CIVIL ESTABLISHMENTS IN RELIGION, A GROUND OF INFIDELITY;

OR,

THE TWO EXTREMES Shewn to be UNITED:

From an ESSAY on ESTABLISHMENTS IN RELIGION; THOUGHTS on MIRACLES in general, &c.

AND FROM

SOME DEFENCES OF SUBSCRIPTIONS, written against the CONFESSIONAL;

PARTICULARLY,

The PLEA of Dr. IBBETSON, *a Deacon of St. Albans.*

By PHILALETHES LONDINIENSIS.

Contrariam in partem ire videbantur.—

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MVSEVM
BRITAN
NICVM

ADVERTISEMENT

To the READER.

A *Propoſition, which, after much ſerious enquiry, has appeared to me to be the truth, gave title to this pamphlet, viz.* Civil Eſtabliſhments in Religion, a Ground of Infidelity*: *This led me to divide the book into three parts, The* order *is this,—the very ſuperficial reveries of infidelity are put between the cool reaſonings of a learned pleader for eſtabliſhments in religion, and the ravings of bigoted church-men, in defence of ſubſcriptions.*

The deſign *of theſe ſheets, is no other than to defend the rights of private judgment, in all matters of religion, againſt prieſtly claims of dominion over faith and conſcience; and to ſecure the honours of chriſtianity, from the miſrepreſentations both of the haughty churchman, and the conceited infidel.*

Should any aſk, Why a new *publication upon ſubjects which have been ſo long controverted?*

The anſwer would be ready; theſe recent pleas for churchiſm and infidelity, preſume upon giving additional force to all former defences.

The author, herein, has no view of reproach-

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* I do not ſay the *only* ground; levity, pride, profligacy, &c. may be admitted.

ing thoſe worthy clergy of the eſtabliſhment, who are friends to religious liberty, and deſirous of a farther reform in the church. He is profeſſedly engaged, though only as a volunteer, with the author of the Confeſſional, and his brethren, *in expoſing the evils which want a remedy in the eccleſiaſtical conſtitution. He venerates all clergymen of that complexion.*

And being conſcious of having no ill-will to any man, he hopes a firſt regard to TRUTH *may ſecure him from ſevere cenſure: but in whatever manner his publication may be received becauſe of his openly diſapproving* all eſtabliſhments in religion whatſoever; *he ſhall enjoy a ſatisfaction, of which the whole world cannot deprive him,* viz. " *of having meant well.*

P. S. *The Rev. Mr.* PARSONS' Apology for the Church of England, *delivered in the* abbey-church at Bath, *on* Trinity-Sunday, May 25, 1766, *but more lately publiſhed, is not noticed: foraſmuch as a ſingle paſſage will be ſufficient to expoſe his apology to contempt, among all rational chriſtians.* " *It ſeems,* ſays he, *eſpecially mate-*
" *rial and for preſent edification, not ſo much to*
" *diſplay and enlarge upon the principles and*
" *foundation of chriſtianity (or* the GREAT *and*
" MYSTERIOUS DOCTRINE of this ſolemn day)
" *as to prove the profeſſion, faith, and worſhip,*
" *which we of the church of England eſpouſe, to*
" *be good and praiſe-worthy.*" Satis ſuperque.

OBSERVATIONS

OBSERVATIONS

OCCASIONED BY THE

Eſſay on Eſtabliſhments.

PART I.

CHRISTIANITY muſt always have the ſame oppoſition to a worldly policy that it had from the beginning, though it was not neceſſary that the profeſſors thereof ſhould always be expoſed to perſecution. And yet, undoubtedly, the more univerſal reception of the goſpel doctrine, would render civil governments more favourable to the profeſſion. Nor are we to ſuppoſe chriſtianity could be unfriendly to government; for, ſo far as government is *a terror to evil doing, and a praiſe to well doing*, chriſtianity muſt urge ſubjection and obedience. However it meddles not with the different modal forms of government, whether

monarchical, Ariſtocratical, Democratical, or any kind of republican adminiſtration. But inſomuch as it has given no rules nor injunctions relating to civil policy, ſo it will not admit of an alliance with any of its forms. Religion retains an abſolute *independency*, ſo far as it expreſſes ſubjection to the government of the one Lord and law-giver. The religion of Jeſus, and civil government, are therefore incapable of an incorporation with each other. The province of the one, and of the other, are juſt as different as that of the unſeen internal principles of the mind, and the viſible external behaviour which affects the ſafety and weal of ſociety. The magiſtrate is not authoriſed to exerciſe his private judgment in the province of religion, nor can he do it for the public good; becauſe it will be ſhewn, that his private judgment cannot operate at all in this province.

This very ſenſible writer is aware of danger or hazard, and therefore ſays, "he (the civil magiſtrate) muſt be-"ware, however, of a precipitate and "ill-grounded judgment. Thouſands "are intereſted in his choice. And by "a regard to all their intereſts, he is "obliged to uſe all the means of right "infor-

" information which his high authority " puts in his power *."

THIS conceſſion is enough to ſhew, that the province of religion is much too ſacred for the purpoſe of the magiſtrate's interpoſing his authority, or even exerciſing his private judgment for the public good, in that province. His authority can extend no farther than things relative to civil life, and thoſe expreſs overt-actions which affect the ſafety and weal of ſociety.

To talk of his " preferring chriſtian- " ity to paganiſm, and diſtinguiſhing it " by public marks of favour †;" is a piece of very fallacious reaſoning: for as a magiſtrate, the pagan ſubject, that conforms to all the laws of civil order, has an equal right to protection and defence with the chriſtian ſubject. Equal government alike extends its influence to the benefit of all the governed, who are alike obedient. But the above propoſition is laid down for the ſake of another, *viz.* " The ſame principles will juſtify " him in making a diſtinction amongſt " thoſe *ſects* into which chriſtianity is " unhappily divided."—This, methinks, cannot be juſt; becauſe the diviſion of

* Page 20, 21. † P. 22.

the chriſtians into different ſects or modes of profeſſion, is ſo far from being an unhappineſs, that it is an open evidence of their virtuouſly uſing a *liberty* wherewith Chriſt has made them free. So that wherever there is a reſtraint laid on the mode of profeſſion, and a monopoly of the magiſtrate's favour to one ſect, there is a manifeſt inſult offered to the authority of Jeſus, and an injury done to the rights of conſcience.

THIS *eſſayiſt* is led, by the force of truth, to own this, when he ſays, "Were we all influenced by this ſpirit, "(of charity) we ſhould then differ in "opinion without being divided in af-"fection; the peace of mankind would "then no longer be diſturbed, but all "would enjoy their own opinions in "quietneſs. Nay, our differences in "other reſpects, whilſt we agreed in "charity, might even appear, on ſome "accounts, deſirable; giving room for "the enlargement of that virtue; and "bringing ſocieties of different perſua-"ſions to appear only as different pro-"vinces in the great kingdom of cha-"rity *."

He had before confeſſed, "It is far "above our power to bring all to em-"brace

* Page 145.

" brace the ſame opinions. But one " thing is in our power, to think cha- " ritably of each other *."—I preſume to ſay, were it in the magiſtrate's power to bring all to embrace the ſame opinions, he would then have the moſt malignant ſucceſs in the exerciſe of that his power; and ſo far as the efforts of his authority are made to *prevent diverſity of opinions*, ſo far he perverts the deſign of magiſtracy; and does the utmoſt he is able to do to render us incapable of making any uſe of that fine obſervation which the author has given us of *Hooker's*, viz. " We ſhould admire the wiſdom of God " which ſhineth in the beautiful variety " of all things: but moſt in the mani- " fold and yet harmonious diſſimilitude " of thoſe ways, whereby his church " upon earth is guided from age to age " throughout all generations of men †." The partiality of the civil magiſtrate, his taking one ſect into alliance with himſelf, and beſtowing all civil favours, and privileges, and honours, upon that ſect, is not ſurely an apt method of diffuſing this ſpirit of charity, but muſt be a direct means of undermining the foundations of the chriſtian religion.—How will this writer, with the leaſt propriety, ſay,

* Page 144. † Page 145.

ſay,—" Difference in ſentiments would " then be no more than the ſounds of " different ſtrings, which would have a " pleaſing effect, whilſt charity tuned " the whole, and every little diſcord " quickly returned into that great and " fundamental harmony *."

WILL he affirm,—That the father of a large family of children would diſcover wiſdom, prudence, or good underſtanding, who, in order to cultivate brotherly love, or charity, among his children, ſhould beſtow his favours on that ſon and daughter only, who, like himſelf, were extremely fond of ſwine's-fleſh; and gave it the preference to all other food that is provided for man? Would this be an apt means of exciting their brotherly affection towards one another?

IN this eſſay the magiſtrate is repreſented as delivering into the hands of the people the ſacred canon, and as leaving them at full liberty to inform themſelves concerning the truths therein contained. No doubt ſome ſorts of magiſtrates have preſumed to exerciſe ſuch unwarrantable power, as to pretend an authority to give or with-hold from their people the ſacred books which God has given for the inſtruction of all mankind.—So did our

* Page 145.

our *Henry* VIII.—but then, he thereby took the moſt enſlaving power out of the hands of the church; and ſo diſabled the tyranny of papal Rome. But in times of greater light and knowledge, no chriſtian magiſtrate, who knows any thing of the difference of the things which belong to *Cæſar*, and thoſe which belong to GOD, will dare to aſſume any ſuch authority in the province of religion: therefore here is an aſſumption we ſhall debate with this writer, who ſays, "It "will not be ſufficient that he delivers "into their hands the ſacred books "which contain theſe truths, and leaves "them at full liberty to inform them-"ſelves *."—How deteſtable this repreſentation of the magiſtrate's office! What chriſtian magiſtrate dares to aſſume ſuch a prerogative, as that of having it at his pleaſure, whether the people ſhall, or ſhall not have the divine canon to conſult? You ſay, look around you, into all the popiſh countries.——So I do, but am not obliged to own, they have one chriſtian magiſtrate among them. And are you, *Sir*, obliged to ſuppoſe ſuch diabolical power to lie at the bottom of your Eſtabliſhments in Religion? The idea is too ſhocking to a mind acquainted

* Page 25.

quainted with the name of PROTESTANT, and with his unalienable claims.

Ay, but ſuch a conceſſion as above-mentioned, is not ſufficient,—"The "magiſtrate will not truſt to the chance "of people's inſtructing themſelves, nei-"ther will it be prudent in him to leave "a matter of this moment to the hazard "of ſome fit perſons being moved, "merely by a zeal for the public ſer-"vice, voluntarily to undertake the "taſk of inſtructing them *."—An order of men muſt be ſet apart, and dedicated to the purpoſe of public inſtruction—and a proviſion made for them too.

One would be inclined to aſk, what more danger could poſſibly accrue from the not providing for the magiſtrate's favourite ſect, than there does from his leaving all the other ſects unprovided for? And whether ſuch proviſion made for the inſtruction of that ſect alone, has been more beneficial to the ſouls of men, than the care taken of the ſouls of the other ſects of chriſtian profeſſors? Or, whether the obliging all other ſects to pay an equal proportion to the ſupport of an order of clergy, which belongs only to the favourite ſect, can be ſhewn to be upon any principle of reaſon, juſtice, or equity?

* Page 26.

equity? And again, ſince the people of the ſeveral other ſects do encourage and ſupport thoſe teachers and inſtructors, which they themſelves have voluntarily choſen, notwithſtanding they are taxed for the ſupport of the eſtabliſhed clergy, what poſſible hazard could the civil magiſtrate run, in leaving the whole of his people to the chance of being provided with proper paſtors, to guide and lead them in the offices of devotion? Has not the magiſtrate had an *end* to anſwer of a very different nature?—In truth, the author is aware, that civil advantages will rather encourage *hypocriſy* than religion.

How does he creep from under the weight of this objection? Why, could you think it? he is able to ſay, "Conſidering things merely in a political "light, even this *hypocriſy* is an advan"tage to ſociety. The hypocrite regu"lates his outward conduct in the ſame "manner as if he were really moved by "the inward principle of good. And "therefore the diſſimulation of good"neſs, were there the ſame ſecurity for "its continuance, is, to political ſocie"ty, the ſame thing as goodneſs it"ſelf *."

* Page 28

THIS is very uncommon reaſoning! It has ſuch a daring complexion, that it puts me to the bluſh, and creates no ſmall difficulty how to make remarks upon it: for I know not a more hateful character than the hypocrite!—It is certain that the author of the chriſtian religion has laid an emphaſis upon it, as having in it an exceſs of malignity. And inaſmuch as religion has nothing to offer but ſpiritual rewards, thoſe who embrace the profeſſion, or come into the church for the ſake of civil advantages, muſt, of all others, be men of no principle; and capable of any compliances that may ſuit with their temporal intereſts. How this diſſimulation of goodneſs can be conceived to be the ſame thing to civil or political ſociety, as goodneſs itſelf, is ſurely not capable of any demonſtration.

To follow the eſſayiſt a little farther; the clergyman upon *his* eſtabliſhment, "Ought indeed to have higher aims, "and to look far above and beyond this "life. But he muſt not expect a mira- "culous ſupply.—And though to refuſe "wordly advantages, indeed ſhews a "greatneſs of mind, and a mind influ- "enced by better motives, yet it is ſtill "greater; it is a proof ſtronger, and leſs "equivocal, of the mind being under

"that

" that better influence, to make a right " uſe of wordly advantages. Miniſters " of religion ſhould ſet an example of " every kind of virtue,—of reſignation " and fortitude under ſuffering; but no " leſs of a right uſe and application of " this world's goods, when they fall " fairly to their lot.—Nor is there any " thing to reſtrain them from accepting " the proviſion made for them by the " magiſtrate *." The more dignified the clergy, the more capable of exalted virtue!—So runs the ſcheme of Eſtabliſhments in Religion: and one would be tempted to think the author has no ſmall appointment in the church. It has already been hinted, and with no ſlender evidence, that the proviſions, the large proviſions made for the dignified clergy, as well as the more moderate portions of this world's goods, taken from the eſtates and purſes of all the ſects who are not of the eſtabliſhment, does not ſeem to be a very equitable proviſion. There is ſomething extremely arbitrary, partial, and inequitable, in this very proviſion. Nay, without carrying the matter thus far, ſhould the majority of the eſtabliſhed clergy, and the moſt laborious

* Page 30, 31, 32, 33.

laborious of that body of men, give their judgment on the caſe of the diſproportionate allotments of theſe worldly proviſions, they would, I am confident, give a verdict very unfavourable to the civil magiſtrate. There is therefore ſomething in the chriſtian laws, the laws of truth and righteouſneſs, that would reſtrain ſome, nay, many of its teachers, from accepting the proviſion made for them by the magiſtrate.

But beſides the conſtant leſſons of its appointed teachers, an eſtabliſhment "has its CREEDS, containing in a ſmall "compaſs all the out-lines and fundamental principles of faith*."

The firſt intention and principal uſe of them, we are told, is, that, "by them "a general knowledge of religion will "eaſily be propagated and kept up "among the people†."

Now let us impartially examine into the truth of this aſſertion, and ſee how it ſtands. We will not go any diſtance from home, but take an eſtimate from thoſe compendiums of chriſtian doctrine, which are ſaid "to be of ſuch "admirable uſe in ſpreading among the "people, and maintaining in their "minds an uniform and comprehenſive "know-

* Page 34. † Ibid.

" knowledge of the fundamentals of " their holy faith."

To begin with that *creed*, called the *apoſtles*, ſaid in both morning and evening prayer; how does this ſerve ſuch valuable purpoſes in ſome of its articles, though perhaps it is one of the moſt unexceptionable creeds received by any church eſtabliſhment among chriſtians; *viz. I believe that Jeſus Chriſt did deſcend into hell.* What ſort of fundamental is this? and how does it tend to ſpread chriſtian knowledge among the people;—And again, what religious knowledge is there conveyed in ſaying, *I believe in the holy catholic church?* This is a ſort of knowledge that can never defireably be propagated; unleſs by that church which moſt arrogantly claims the name of *catholic*. Have the people any one uſeful idea belonging to this article of faith? I trow not; and can by no means allow, that it belongs to any one fundamental principle of chriſtian faith. I will not do more than mention, that other article, which ſome very learned men of the Engliſh proteſtant church eſtabliſhment, have openly denied a place in the goſpel-teachings, I mean, *the reſurrection of the body* *.

Now

* The late Dr. Arthur Aſhley Sykes, for one.

Now I thus reaſon, if this moſt unexceptionable of all eſtabliſhed creeds, does contain ſeveral articles which have no countenance in the chriſtian doctrines, and about which the people cannot have any uniform or determinate idea; church creeds then cannot be of that uſe and importance which is here pretended.

But to put the matter beyond controverſy, let us take notice of two other eſtabliſhed creeds, which are in the liturgy of the church of England. And firſt, the *Nicene*, uſed in the communion ſervice, and after the reading of the goſpel, as if it was a compendium of chriſtian doctrines, which ſays,—*I believe in one Lord Jeſus Chriſt, God of God, light of light, very God of God—being of one ſubſtance with the father.*—It is notorious, that great numbers of the conforming clergy are ready to own, this is of very dark and doubtful meaning; and all unprejudiced and rational enquirers muſt allow, that there can be no ideas formed of the ſenſe and meaning of theſe articles of faith; and conſequently, they have no tendency to propagate or keep up a knowledge of religion, or to maintain in the minds of the people a comprehenſive knowledge of the fundamentals of faith; unleſs *incomprehenſible* may be ſaid

to

to ſpread among the people comprehenſive knowledge; and thoſe may be deemed fundamental articles of faith, that have no ſenſe nor meaning, nor have any traces of an origination in the New Teſtament writings. But which we add, the ATHANASIAN *creed*, we have ſuch a collection of incomprehenſibles and inconceivables, as has no parrallel that I have ever read or heard of in the Pagan, Mahometan, Popiſh, Jewiſh, or Chriſtian liturgies. It would be too tedious to go over the numerous articles in this ſymbol; and will be enough that we only obſerve, the confidence with which it damns every one who does not receive and keep whole and undefiled this creed.—*Charity* is the end of the commandment, but not of the creed.

It is farther ſaid, "That confeſſion "of faith is clearly a chriſtian duty, and "ought to make a part of public wor-"ſhip *". —How this can be made appear is another thing, and perhaps will be much too hard a talk for this eſſayiſt on eſtabliſhments.—If indeed he would only be underſtood to mean, that a ſociety of chriſtians cannot meet together, and offer up prayers and praiſes to the one God, in the name, or according to the

* Page 35.

the direction of the one Lord, without profeſſing to believe in the teachings of Jeſus; it is readily owned, that confeſſion of faith is requiſite to chriſtian worſhip; for no man can come to God, or pay him an acceptable homage, but *he muſt believe that he is, and that he is the rewarder of them who diligently ſeek him.* However that does not ſeem to be the ſenſe of this writer; but, by a confeſſion of faith making a part of public worſhip, he would be underſtood to mean an open recital of ſome ſymbol; ſuch as one or more of the creeds above-mentioned. This moſt probably is his opinion, but he has nothing in all the New Teſtament to ground his aſſertion upon. It is then but mere opinion, and without any foundation in the goſpel canon.

As I have ſaid this, it will be but fit and proper to notice the reaſoning of this writer: he ſays, "The uſe of creeds "then (I take it for granted he means in public worſhip, of which he has been ſpeaking juſt before) "is derived from "our Saviour himſelf, and confirmed to "us by the experience of every chriſ-"tian age *."

How is this an inference? or, from what? Why, truly, "We are to ob-"ſerve,

* Page 35.

"ſerve, that our Saviour himſelf hath "*ſanctified* the uſe of creeds by his own "repeated practice. For often, in the "courſe of his miniſtry, he did demand "from thoſe, on whom he was ready "to beſtow any ſignal favour, a confeſ-"ſion of their faith." This is a very *aſtoniſhing* proof of his ſanctifying the uſe of creeds! And, verily, ſo it ought to be; becauſe this uſe of creeds was on account of miraculous power, which he exerciſed in giving eyes to the blind, feet to the lame, health to the diſtempered, ſoundneſs to the unclean and diſeaſed. And pray what were the creeds he ſanctified, by requiring men ſhould believe him qualified to heal them? Not ſurely any church-ſymbols: for there is no ſort of analogy; there is not any thing in the premiſe to ſupport ſuch a concluſion. Will any man, in his ſober hours, indulge to ſuch wild and fanatical imagination?—Our author owns, indeed, "That the forms he made uſe of were "extremely ſhort and ſimple, they con-"tained but one article of faith. *Be-"lieveſt thou this.*"—One would then be inclined to think, from his own account, Jeſus did not make uſe of forms, unleſs in grammatical concord the *plural* and *ſingular* be perfectly harmonious, the one

in the predicate and the other in the ſubject. The *forms* he made uſe of were this only, *Believeſt thou?* i. e. he did no more than aſk whether they had faith. He hereby conveys no ſuch idea as that of modes or forms; but only required that they believed him to be able to relieve them. A moſt wonderful demonſtration of our Lord's ſanctifying the uſe of creeds; ay, of church creeds, too! Reader, allow me to uſe the ſame form of addreſs, *Believeſt thou this?*—What would this eſſayiſt have ſaid, had any oppoſer of church-eſtabliſhments ſo egregiouſly trifled with the underſtandings of his readers? Would he not have treated him with a deſerved ſeverity, and an open contempt? A more idle and enthuſiaſtic piece of argument never, ſurely, came from ſuch an able pen.

We are next to attend to "a ſecondary uſe of creeds ariſing from the former: for as they contain the great articles of faith embraced by the church, they muſt be characteriſtic of that church, ſerving to diſtinguiſh it from all others, and remaining to all poſterity as monuments of faith, which is thus conveyed unadulterated from age to age. Which creeds muſt be ſhort and clear, made eaſy both to the under-

" underſtanding and to the memory, " otherwiſe they will not anſwer either " intention *."

TAKE we a retroſpect of the *three* eſtabliſhed creeds, and examine into their conſtruction. Are there any articles in them which are, in truth, fundamental principles of faith? Theſe cannot anſwer the above intention; for ſo far they do not ſerve as diſtinguiſhing ſymbols. e. g. *I believe in God the father almighty, maker of heaven and earth; and I believe alſo in Jeſus Chriſt.* Theſe are articles of faith, held by all chriſtian churches, and therefore cannot anſwer the intention of diſtinguiſhing ſymbols. But then it will be ſaid, there are other articles in the ſame ſymbols, which are characteriſtic. Admit there are; even ſuch as we find, in great plenty, in the *Athanaſian* creed: yet this church-ſymbol is diſqualified for the intention above-mentioned, ſince it is neither *ſhort*, *clear*, nor *eaſy* to the underſtanding.—Let any man judge for himſelf, we appeal to *reaſon* and *revelation*, that it contains a great number of articles, which they abſolutely diſown; and, conſequently, if this creed be characteriſtic of any church, it muſt determine its being an extremely fanatical one.

* Page 36.

So far then from being a monument of unadulterated chriſtian faith, it will anſwer a very reverſe intention.—

ANOTHER proviſion is made by a church-eſtabliſhment, and that is, "None "but its genuine doctrines may be "taught by thoſe to whom it commits "the office of public inſtruction.—For "if men were admitted to the office of "teaching without ſome ſuch ſecurity, "did it leave them wholly at liberty to "propagate what opinions they pleaſe, "the church might ſoon be thrown into "confuſion, be rent and divided an hun-"dred ways; and, in a word, deſtroyed "under its own commiſſion."

WE have ſeen that the intention of *creeds* is, that of being, in fact, diſtinguiſhing ſymbols, characteriſtic of that church ſo eſtabliſhed; and in being ſo, excluding thereby all other chriſtian ſocieties. And even here, the clergy are denied the uſe of their reaſon and underſtanding, and are not allowed to read the ſcriptures but by the medium of church-creeds: they are not permitted to form any judgment of the teachings of Jeſus and his apoſtles, but what ſhall be altogether conſonant with theſe diſtinguiſhing articles of faith. Such an office of public

* Page 36.

public teaching is a bleſſed one indeed! but what no man in his ſenſes, and who underſtood any thing of the nature of chriſtian liberty would accept, whatever ſhould be the worldly emoluments.

We are farther told, "No church "can be ſuppoſed to give a power to be "exerted to its own ruin *."

Pray let me aſk, what *church* is there in the world ſo conſtituted, that ought thus to bind the conſciences of men? And what it is in any church that can ſuffer loſs, by the judgment of its teachers being left free, and the powers of enquiry undiſturbed by any cramping church-commiſſions; unleſs it be, the loſs of the *wood*, the *hay*, and the *ſtubble*? No church is worth ſupporting that gives law to conſcience; or where the faith of the profeſſors ſtands not in the power of God, but in the wiſdom of men. Nor can I perceive any the leaſt difference in the argument here uſed for eſtabliſhments in religion, and that uſed by the popiſh prieſt, and the zealous advocate of that ſhocking monopoly.

And yet, this writer will now and then lay down principles or maxims, as reverſe to his plan, as light is to darkneſs. To mention one, at preſent,—"Reli-

"gion

* Page 37.

" GION being of a peaceful nature, hath " in itſelf no power but that which be- " longs to the mind, and ſeeks to ex- " tend its dominion by no other means " but thoſe of conviction, and the in- " fluence of motives ſuited to the free- " dom of the mind. To become a ſub- " ject of this power, the mind muſt be " free, maſter of itſelf, and its own de- " terminations; for into the kingdom " of religion no ſlave can enter *."

WHO would wiſh a writer to ſay any thing more juſtly? But what is this account of religion to ſerve? Why, to ſhew, " That as the magiſtrate is en- " truſted with the care of the whole " conſtitution, he is obliged to maintain " it by ſuch means as are in his power; " that is by the application of *civil ſanc- " tions*: by which means it is that civil " pains and penalties can in any degree " belong to religion. They belong not " to its diſtinct nature, but reſult ſolely " from its ſtate of aſſociation with the " civil conſtitution. All coercive pow- " er, exerciſed on account of religion, is " derived from the civil power, and is " given by the civil power for its own " ſake. The church poſſeſſes no human " power in its own right, nor exerciſes " it

* Page 41.

" it on its own account *."—Juſt ſo reaſoneth the *Jeſuit*, when he would defend the Romiſh church from having any hand in the puniſhment of heretics, whom ſhe has delivered up to the ſecular arm in order to be puniſhed.—Compare this with the definition given of religion, p. 41. " No means but thoſe of conviction, " and the influence of motives ſuited to " the freedom of the mind, can belong " to the ſpiritual nature of religion." But notwithſtanding this, the province of the magiſtrate is ſuch, that *civil pains and penalties* belong to religion. They can, and do, though the motives muſt be ſuch only as are ſuited to the freedom of the mind,—" For the mind muſt be " free, maſter of itſelf, and of its own " determinations; for into the kindom " of religion no ſlave can enter."

WELL, but ſtay a little; " The ma- " giſtrate may not carry his power into " the regions of pure and unmixed reli- " gion. He muſt apply his temporal " ſanctions to religion only where the " preſervation of the ſtate calls for " them †."—But how is this—, " The " ſole end of the magiſtrate's appoint- " ment is the preſervation of property, " and the ſecuring to mankind all the " bene-

* Page 42, 43. † Page 43.

" benefits belonging to human ſociety*." And again, " As religion has to do only " with a man's own conſcience, the care " of his ſalvation, and his happineſs in " a future ſtate, it muſt be acknow- " ledged to lye entirely out of the ma- " giſtrate's province†."—Is religion entirely out of the magiſtrate's province; and yet he muſt apply his temporal ſanctions to religion, in ſome ſuppoſeable caſes? This, ſurely, is very abſurd reaſoning. Pray what are thoſe caſes? *Only where the preſervation of the ſtate calls for them.* What a ſoleciſm is this? Can religion in any poſſible inſtance endanger the ſtate? Aſſuredly it cannot. By the definition this very writer gives of religion, " It is of a peaceful ſpiritual na- " ture, and has in itſelf no power but " what belongs to the mind, and ſeeks " to extend its dominion by no other " means but thoſe of conviction, and the " influence of motives ſuited to the " freedom of the mind." It is not, therefore, poſſible, that temporal ſanctions can be applied to religion; and wherever the magiſtrate pretends to do it, he goes out of his province, and perverts the end of his ordination. The civil magiſtrate has nothing at all to do in this province

* Page 41. † Page 39.

province; becauſe of its being impoſſible, that a mind will be left free and maſter of itſelf, and its own determinations, where he applies his temporal ſanctions to religion. It follows, that this writer has been attempting to mingle fire and water. His ſophiſms are obvious: his reaſonings are extremely artificial and inconcluſive.

THIS writer indeed declares, he would not ſupport religion by *perſecution*:— "This would be to make uſe of male-"volence and infernal fury, by way of "promoting peace and good-will; it is "in the cauſe of heaven, to put on "armour forged in hell *."

THIS is very juſt. But are we quite certain he meaneth all he ſaith? Of this one cannot be quite ſo ſanguine; for in the very next paragraph he thus expreſſeth himſelf.—"It appears then that all "*penal laws* relating to the profeſſion of "religion, ariſe not from religion itſelf, "but from the civil power; and that "they are never to be put in force for "the ſake of religion itſelf, or on any "pretence merely religious, but only "for the ſake of civil government."

"WERE theſe principles duly attend-"ed to, the religious liberties of man-

* Page 44.

" kind would be ſafe from violation;
" ſince the magiſtrate would never hold
" up on its account the terrors of the
" civil power but where he was obliged
" to do it in defence of mens natural
" and civil liberties."

Is it poſſible for any human mind to form a ſatisfactory notion of this writer's aim? What, in the name of truth, would he be willing to have us think of *penal laws*, relating to the profeſſion of religion not ariſing from religion itſelf, but from the civil power, which are never to be put in force for the ſake of religion itſelf, or on any pretence merely religious, but only for the ſake of civil government? If he has any meaning, or would be conſiſtent, no *penal laws* can operate at all ſo as to affect any religious profeſſion, becauſe they ſhould not be put in force for the ſake of religion, or on any pretence merely religious: which granted, it follows, that the civil magiſtrate has not any thing to do with religion; becauſe penal laws can never be put in force but only for the ſake of civil government.

YET, it ſeems, " The civil magiſ-
" trate exerciſes his authority within its
" proper limits, when he encourages
" that religion whoſe principles are moſt
" favour-

" favourable to ſociety;—when he ap-
" points teachers to inſtruct the people
" in the principles of that religion;—
" when he demands a ſecurity that they
" ſhall teach its genuine doctrines, and
" deliver them uncorrupted to the peo-
" ple;—when he provides for the edu-
" cation and ſupport of thoſe teachers;—
" and when he incorporates theſe inſti-
" tutions with his political ſyſtem. In
" all theſe inſtances he acts directly for
" the welfare and ſecurity of ſociety."

THIS is to aſſert or affirm with confidence, what requires much more convincing proof than our author, I ſhould imagine, will ever be able to produce. Who is it that muſt allow the magiſtrate does thus exerciſe his authority within its proper limits? And how, upon theſe principles, are the religious liberties of mankind ſafe from violation? None will be able to ſee this, unleſs he had his eyes aſſiſted by ſpectacles of church-grinding. Is there any ſort of evidence, ariſing from reaſon, nature, or the relation of things, that can convince any man, who is not a favourite ſon of the eſtabliſhment? What welfare, what ſecurity to ſociety, did ever ariſe from ſuch inſtitution? e. g. Has it ever been known that the *proteſtant-diſſenters* from

a civil church eſtabliſhment, have been leſs ſteady friends to liberty, and to the laws of a civil conſtitution, than the ſons of the church-eſtabliſhment? Have they not, upon all occaſions, been the moſt ſtrenuous oppoſers of arbitrary power, and all the wanton ſchemes of ſovereignty? Are there any people in the community, of more inoffenſive morals? And ſo long as theſe are facts, that *liberty* could not have lived in Britain hitherto but for a proteſtant diſſent, and that with the decline and diſcouragement thereof, has been and muſt be the decline of the ſpirit of liberty; it will not be in the power of this pen, though it had had the hand of an arch-biſhop to guide it, to make it appear, that in the above inſtances the magiſtrate acts directly for the welfare and ſecurity of ſociety *.

THE

* THE learned and judicious Dr. *Lardner*, in his Credibility, chap. 71. on the *council of Nice*, reaſons thus, "Can it be ſhewn, that there is any ground or authority from reaſon, or from Jeſus Chriſt, whereby you, (the council) are allowed, or enjoined to require your brethren, to ſign certain ſpeculative articles, whether they believe them or not? Nay, is not this quite contrary to the deſign and example of the lord Jeſus, who never propoſed to men any arguments, but ſuch as were ſuited to gain the judgment?"

"IF any pretend it to be of importance, that others ſhould ſign, or profeſs certain doctrines, ſuppoſed by them to be true: I would anſwer, that ſincerity is of

"yet

THE learned writer on eſtabliſhments owns, "Some great men have thought, "that religion is in all reſpects, with re-"gard to its outward form as well as its "in-

"yet greater importance. And you ought never to en-"deavour to ſecure the intereſt of ſpeculative points, "with the prejudice of what is of greater moment, "*honeſty* and *integrity*."

HE farther ſays of this council, "They ſhould have "humbly recommended it to the emperor to take care, "and in his great wiſdom to provide, that all who "acted peaceably ſhould be protected in the ſeveral "cities, where they dwelt; and that all, who cauſed "tumults and diſturbances, or, by any outward act, "infringed the liberty of their neighbours, on account "of diverſity of opinion, ſhould be reſtrained and "puniſhed, as the nature of their offence required."

AGAIN, "It is not more than what men are taught "by the common principles of equity. The goſpel too "teaches and enacts moderation and forbearance, and "condemns all impoſitions on the conſciences of men, "and all force and violence in things of religion."

ONCE more, "Theſe impoſitions poiſon the waters "of the ſanctuary at the very fountain. They require "the miniſters of Chriſt, the officers of his church, to "ſubſcribe certain articles, upon pain of heavy for-"feitures. And a ſubſcription to theſe articles, whe-"ther believed, or not, gives a right to preferment. "If any ſubſcribe what they are not ſatisfied about, and "ſo enter into the ſervice of the church, they gain and "hold their offices by the tenure of hypocriſy. How "can religion flouriſh this way?

THESE obſervations clearly ſhew, that the power of the magiſtrate cannot extend to religion, as that power is to reſtrain and puniſh all infringements on liberty, on account of diverſity of opinion. And he cannot, in that province, apply civil pains and penalties; becauſe to enforce by worldly menaces and recompences, any ſpeculative doctrines, is not conſiſtent with the genius and ſpirit of chriſtianity.

" inward conſtitution, independent on " the civil magiſtrate, and wholly out of " the reach of all civil ſanctions:" but then, he thinks, " They have probably " been miſled into theſe opinions by fix- " ing their whole attention on the diſtinct " and ſeparate natures of religion and " the civil power, without conſidering " their relation to each other, or en- " tering into thoſe *new* laws which ariſe " from their connection *."

I CANNOT forbear imagining I ſee the hand that drew this veil over truth, and that would thus artfully inſinuate, that things of ſo diſtinct and ſeparate a nature as religion and civil power are, can be capable of uniting, or of admitting the moſt intimate alliance. Very probably it is from an intereſted pen, to which the labour of reconciling an alliance between religion and civil power, muſt be very agreeable employment. But what violence muſt be offered to the reaſon and nature of things, for a diſintereſted perſon to imagine this alliance? Is it poſſible that ſuch *diſparates* as religion and civil power can incorporate in one ſyſtem? " Government, as it has the " care of civil ſociety, and the improve- " ment of man's condition in that; and " religion,

* Page 45, 46.

" religion, as it regards only man's ſpi-
" ritual concerns, and his intereſt in
" eternity; are two diſtinct and wholly
" independent inſtitutions. Conſidered
" in this light only, they cannot poſſi-
" bly unite or form any fair alliance,
" and the interfering one with the other
" will be a manifeſt uſurpation *."

THIS is plain, it is what any one may underſtand; and does abſolutely determine the impoſſibility of any alliance between them.—Here, one would conclude, the inſtitutions to be eternally diſtinct: and readily aſſent to the truth of that divine declaration, made by the author of our religion, who ſaid, *my kingdom is not of this world.* But, alas! this fond advocate for a civil eſtabliſhment of religion, cannot ſuffer the matter to reſt here. The diſtinction, as it ſtands, is too galling for him. And he is reſolved to give a mutability to things in their own nature immutable; for he adds, " But though civil government
" be wholly confined to man's preſent
" condition, and can have no poſſible
" concern with his future exiſtence, yet
" religion on its part is not ſo wholly
" engaged about man's future condition,
" as to be unconcerned about his pre-
" ſent

* Page 39.

" ſent. His happineſs hereafter is in-
" deed its great end, but it is neceſſarily
" concerned with his behaviour here in
" its way to that end. It cannot bring
" him to a better world, but by taking
" him under its conduct through this*."

WHAT ſort of ſophiſtical reaſoning is this? If civil government be wholly confined to a man's preſent condition, and can have no poſſible concern with his future exiſtence, then it can have nothing to do with his religion. And who ever ſaid, that religion is wholly unconcerned about a man's preſent condition? Religion will ſecure a man's ſtrict attention to all ſocial and moral duties and obligations. e. g. " Religion will teach
" a man to be diligent and honeſt in his
" lawful calling; and convince him,
" that he who does not provide for his
" own houſe, is worſe than an infidel.
" It will teach him to render to all their
" dues; tribute to whom tribute; fear
" to whom fear; and honour to whom
" honour." But how will this prove that the magiſtrate has any ſort of influence over his religion, becauſe religion does not leave a man unconcerned about his preſent exiſtence? And yet this writer thus expreſſes himſelf; " Religion,
" then,

* Page 39, 40.

" then, having a natural influence on " mens behaviour in ſociety, an influ- " ence not caſual and uncertain, but ex- " tenſive, deep, and laſting; and the " regulation of mens behaviour in ſocie- " ty being the immediate object of civil " government, there ariſes a neceſſary " relation and a ſtrong connexion be- " tween them *."

PRAY, what is this neceſſary relation and ſtrong connexion that ariſes? Not any thing that has the leaſt meaning in it. The regulation of mens behaviour in ſociety, is, undoubtedly, the immediate object of civil government: but this does no way prove, that a man's behaviour towards his maker is the immediate object of civil government. There ariſes no neceſſary relation, nor any connexion at all between them.—Here the fallacy opens; and the ſophiſtry is flagrant. Overt-acts, or ſuch expreſſions as diſturb the order of ſociety; the violations of truth, the frauds and injuries which men are guilty of towards one another, the civil magiſtrate certainly ought to puniſh. But what is all this to the purpoſe of his taking cognizance of matters which lie between God and a man's own ſoul, the care of his ſalvation, and his happineſs

* Page 40.

in a future ſtate? A concern, even about ones *preſent condition*, will ordinarily be found wholly independent on the care of the civil magiſtrate. For which way does he aſſiſt a man in getting his bread; in raiſing his fortune; or in forming his ſecular ſchemes, and advantageous or pleaſing connexions in ſociety?—Did this writer mean, "That religion cannot "bring a man to a better world, but by "the magiſtrate's taking him under his "conduct through this?" If he did, I own he is not, to me, intelligible.

He goes on,—"This ſhews at once, "how, and how far, religion is ſubject "to the magiſtrate; and diſtinctly marks "out the limits to which his care over "it may extend. As far as religion "operates on ſociety, ſo far it is ſubject "to the inſpection and regulation of the "civil magiſtrate, and ſo far only *."

I take the liberty to debate the truth of this paragraph; and do affirm, that ſo far from religion being ſubject to the inſpection and regulation of the civil magiſtrate, to the extent of its operation on ſociety, that he is no ſort of judge how far religion does operate on ſociety. He knows nothing of the degrees of influence which it has. The religion of a com-

* Page 40.

community is not under his inſpection and regulation. If he knows the religion of his own mind, it is as much as he can know. And if he has any real religion, he cannot know how far even that operates on ſociety. Religion, therefore, is neither ſubject to the inſpection nor to the regulation of the civil magiſtrate. And were it poſſible it could be under his management, there is too much reaſon to apprehend, that ordinarily it would not fare a whit the better for that his inſpection and regulation. But, thank heaven, we are aſſured he has no kind of authority in the province of religion.

It ought to be obſerved, on the other hand, that there can be nothing in the operations of religion upon ſociety, but what muſt be favourable and beneficial to mankind. Whatever, therefore, can properly fall under the inſpection, and need the regulation of the civil magiſtrate, muſt ever be ſomething that is immoral, vicious, or irreligious. St. *Paul* would convey this idea of the end of civil government, when he ſays, "We "know that the law is good if a man "uſe it lawfully; being aſſured that the "law is not made for a righteous man, "but for the lawleſs and diſobedient, "for the ungodly and for ſinners, for

" unholy and profane; for murtherers
" of fathers, and murtherers of mothers;
" for men-ſlayers, for whore-mongers,
" for them that defile themſelves with
" mankind, for men-ſtealers, for liars,
" for perjured perſons *."

But who does not ſee that this is a very different thing from that of the magiſtrate's taking cognizance of religion, as it operates on ſociety. If this *eſſayiſt* had not been under ſtrong prejudices, he muſt have avoided thoſe erroneous opinions into which he is unhappily fallen; and would have eſcaped the deluſion, had he kept his attention wholly fixed on the diſtinct and ſeparate natures of religion and the civil power. Whereas he has very ſtrangely bewildered himſelf by imagining a relation between them, and by ſuppoſing fanciful *new* laws ariſing from that very unnatural connexion. It muſt be irreligion, and not religion, that can, in any given caſe, be injurious to ſociety. It is readily granted, that the civil magiſtrate ſhould controul, cenſure, and puniſh the manifeſt effects of impiety. For not any thing could reſtrain men from mutual injuries, were there no laws to controul them. We alſo acknowledge, that all equal and juſt civil laws would

* 1 Tim. i. 8, 9, 10.

would loſe their genuine force, if they might be controverted by the whimſies of a fanatical profeſſion. Actions that are manifeſtly miſchievous, and againſt the weal of ſociety, ought to be reſtrained and puniſhed; but no ſuch actions can be the reſult of religion. So that the idea is a miſtaken one, which ſuppoſes, "The civil magiſtrate may take cogni-"zance of religion as it operates on ſo-"ciety."

The author thus expreſſes himſelf,—"This ſhort view of the nature and ex-"pediency of eſtabliſhments in religion, "hath been drawn from me by an alarm "which I muſt own I have received "from a late applauded publication. "The CONFESSIONAL abounds with "ſpirit, and contains many juſt obſer-"vations, placed in a ſtriking light; and "breathes, at the ſame time, a zeal for "truth and liberty.—But yet it ſeems "as if a cloud reſted viſibly on ſome "parts of the work, preventing the au-"thor's full deſign from being clearly "ſeen."

The cloud which ſo viſibly reſts on the ſhort view taken of Eſtabliſhments in Religion, has been, it is hoped, in ſome good degree, diſſipated: and the further remarks which he makes on the

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Confeſſional, are left to the animadverſions of the author of that valuable publication. Nevertheleſs, ſome letters ſhall be added, which relate to that ſubject.

PART II.

Obſervations occaſioned by Thoughts on Miracles.

THE gentleman who has been pleaſed to publiſh his *Thoughts on Miracles*, has laid before his readers the diſtinct definition given of them by ſeveral chriſtian writers. *Fleetwood's* is, "A miracle is an extraordinary operation of "God, *againſt* the courſe and ſettled "laws of nature, appealing to the "ſenſes." Biſhop *Butler's*, is, "That "a miracle, in its very notion, is relative to a courſe of nature, and implies "ſomething different from it, conſidered as being ſo."—*Hume*, *Voltaire*, and other deiſtical writers, adopt either the term *tranſgreſs*, or *violate* the laws of nature. But Dr. *J. Campbell*, *Hume's* opponent, ſuppoſes him to uſe the term, *tranſgreſſing*, as expreſſive of a *criminal* breaking the eſtabliſhed laws of nature; and

and undertakes to prove, that miracles were wrought by God long before the eſtabliſhment of chriſtianity: nay, he inſtanceth in the creation of the world, as being miraculous; but then is doubtful, as well he might, whether, with ſtrict *propriety*, it may be deemed a miracle. Conſult his firſt five pages*.

Upon theſe definitions and ſtatings of the ſubject, our author ſays, "All, who "believe *miracles*, allow, that they are "particular interpoſitions of divine pow-"er, contrary to the ordinary courſe of "nature †."

Upon this publication, I would make ſome obſervations; and ſhall take the liberty to preface them, by giving another definition of a miracle, ſomewhat different; *viz.* this, "A miracle is a "manifeſt interpoſition of divine power, "that does not operate by any of the "eſtabliſhed laws of nature; but an-"ſwers ſuch divine purpoſes, which "thoſe laws cannot anſwer."

Miracle has, in part, been defined, "An interpoſition which anſwers ſuch "divine purpoſes which the eſtabliſhed "laws of nature could not anſwer;" and may be exemplified by all thoſe miracles which the ſacred ſcriptures have men-

* Thoughts on miracles. † Ibid. p. 3.

mentioned. e. g. Thoſe wrought for the deliverance of the Iſraelites from Egyptian ſlavery, did manifeſt that the God of Iſrael was the only true God. This, the general laws of nature could not demonſtrate to idolatrous nations. Thoſe miracles did alſo confirm the promiſe given to *Moſes*, that he ſhould be made a God to Pharaoh *.—In like manner, miracles bore teſtimony to Jeſus Chriſt, as the promiſed Meſſiah; which the general laws of nature could not do. And, *again*, miraculous gifts beſtowed on apoſtles, after the aſcenſion of their maſter, did demonſtrate the truth of this fact; *viz.* that God had exalted Jeſus to the right hand of power, and made him Lord both of the dead and of the living. An end which the eſtabliſhed laws of nature could not anſwer.

At the ſame time it is readily allowed, that the laws of an infinitely perfect being muſt be ſuited to anſwer all the purpoſes of his government, both natural and moral, in every world that he has formed: but from hence it does not follow, that no particular interpoſitions may become needful; or, that they have been wholly left out of the original purpoſe and plan of the governor; for this reaſon,

* Exod. iv. 16. comp. ch. vii. 1.

reaſon, *viz.* becauſe ſuch particular interpoſitions may yet farther illuſtrate and diſplay the wiſdom and goodneſs, as well as power of the governor. My author ſays, no; and he aſſigns the following reaſons,—" The laws of God muſt, like " himſelf, be perfect, and therefore " can never be altered for the better."— And *again*, " The laws of God being, " like himſelf, *perfect*, we may reaſon- " ably ſuppoſe that they are alſo like " himſelf, *immutable*; and therefore can- " not be *evaded*, *ſuſpended*, or *altered*, " by any other being, not even by God " himſelf, without implying imperfec- " tion, either in him, or in his laws *."

To which I reply, *miracles*, as they are recorded in the ſacred book, cannot be ſaid to have either ſuſpended or altered any one of nature's laws: e. g. *gravitation* and *attraction* remain uninjured; and immutably the ſame; the divine interpoſition did not produce any one effect that was in the leaſt inconſiſtent with nature's laws. There never was any thing in them, that could hint to mankind an *amendment* of thoſe general laws which had received a divine eſtabliſhment. One would be inclined to think that this writer had, in his conceptG tion

* Page 9.

tion of miracles, ſome ideas that are very romantic, and abſolutely repugnant to thoſe interpoſitions which are recorded in the ſacred ſcriptures. Juſt as if ſome diſturbance had been given by them to the courſe of nature, at the time when our Lord gave to a lame man the uſe of his legs, and to a maimed man ſome wanted bodily member; or when he gave ſight to a blind man; miraculouſly fed a multitude; or bid a ſtorm, be calm. But which way did any of theſe miracles affect the eſtabliſhed general laws of nature; or make the leaſt alteration, or imply an *amendment* of any one of them? *Again*, Suppoſe that ſuch has been the interpoſition of divine power, as to raiſe a dead man to life; in what reſpect could ſuch an interpoſition offer the leaſt violence to the general eſtabliſhment? How could it diſcover any phenomenon, that ſhould at all be unworthy the author of being and life; when, by this means, there was divinely atteſted the character of a perſon, by whom God had ſaid, he will raiſe the dead, and judge the world?

"IF, *ſays our author*, the eſtabliſhed, "general laws of God are to be varied, "in order to ſuit or accommodate them "to the actions of creatures; they can-

"not,

" not, like himſelf, be perfect and im-
" mutable, but become dependent on
" the actions of finite and precarious
" beings *."

HERE, again, appears to be ſomething ſuppoſed which cannot be granted by a rational defender of miracles, who has conſidered them to be *a divine teſtimony given to a miſſion*; becauſe the moral ſyſtem of laws has never once, in any age, undergone a change or variation, from ſuch interpoſitions. Nor can they be ſhewn to imply any want either of foreſight, or of power in God; but the very reverſe of it.—However, it is ſuggeſted, " That if we admit of ſuch interpoſi-
" tions, not the eternal, unalterable fit-
" neſs of things, but the actions of crea-
" tures have determined the divine con-
" duct †."—What there is in this objection to miracles, I do not well underſtand. It cannot, I preſume, be ſhewn, that this has any meaning; unleſs it could be proved that there has been any ſort of change or alteration made in the eternal, unalterable fitneſs of things, by ſuch interpoſitions. *On the other hand*, Suppoſe that miracles can be ſhewn to have an apt tendency to excite moral agents to a cloſer attention to the eternal

* Page 10, 11. † P. 11.

and unalterable fitneſs of things, as might, perhaps, without difficulty, be done; why may not the divine conduct be determined by ſuch a view to the actions of his creatures, whom he has ſubjected to the laws of his moral kingdom and government?

Voltaire's definition, which we have, p. 14, by what has been ſaid already, will appear to be fallacious, *viz.* "A mira-"cle is a violation of laws mathematical, "divine, immutable, eternal." For, in truth, they could only be ſhewn to be a violation, if they were attended with inimical, unnatural, monſtrous productions; or if they were cauſal of any effects which were not conſiſtent with thoſe of nature's general laws, which are under a divine eſtabliſhment. No *miracle*, we dare to affirm, can be ſuppoſed real, or to imply a divine interpoſition, that is not conſiſtent and harmonious with the univerſal demonſtration which is given in the viſible ſyſtem, of the eternal power and godhead of the Supreme! Miracle cannot contradict any one known law of the univerſal ſovereign.

But it is ſaid, "If miraculous inter-"poſitions are ever neceſſary in the go-"vernment of *free* beings, why are they

"not

" not always neceſſary; or as neceſſary " at one time as at another time *?"

THIS is a ſtale argument which is here laid down, that has had numberleſs anſwers. From the nature of *miracle*, as it is a divine teſtimony to a miſſion, there could be no reaſon for the interpoſition, but on ſuch great occaſions. And if the author would inſinuate, that miracles offer any violence to the *freedom* of the human mind, and therefore muſt be as needful at one time as at another; we would only refer him to the goſpel-hiſtory for his own confutation: which will abundantly ſhew him, that miracles left all the people free.—At the ſame time they do, beyond all doubt, prove, the abſolute *freedom* of that almighty power which created the world; and has alſo eſtabliſhed the general laws by which he governs the univerſe.—*Beſides*, in the reaſon and *nature* of the thing, miracles never could be wrought to make any alteration in the original ſtandard of moral action; but only upon ſpecial occaſions did they bear teſtimony to the infinite importance of that divine ſtandard.

I WILL not pretend to ſay, what the author of *The Morality of the New Teſtament*, &c. might mean by obſerving, that

* Page 17.

that "*Freedom is a neceſſary adjunct of intelligence* *." I can eaſily form a conception of creatures having intelligence, that do not appear to be actuated by any principle higher than animal inſtinct. And alſo of others, who were endowed with a moral freedom, but have ſacrificed it to appetite and paſſion, and are in a ſtate of abſolute ſlavery, notwithſtanding all their powers of intelligence. Nay, although "the *biſhop of Glouceſter*, in his "doctrine of grace, allows of external "miraculous interpoſitions; yet ſeems "to think that God might, by an im-"mediate application to the mind of "man, anſwer all the purpoſes of al-"tering any of his general laws †."—It by no means follows, that ſuch an application to the human mind is ſuppoſeable. Neither the *biſhop*, nor any other man, is able to prove, that this can be conſiſtent with the plan of God's moral government. No violence can be offered to the *freedom* of the human mind, ſo far as it is moral and accountable.

It is however aſked, "Can it be, "rationally, ſuppoſed, that the kind "parent of the univerſe would exert his "omnipotence, miraculouſly ſuſpend the "laws of nature, and interpoſe in favour "of

* Page 20. † Page 21.

" of one ſmall part of his creation,
" whilſt, at the ſame time, he left the
" other parts deſtitute of his fatherly
" care and protection, and liable to pe-
" riſh everlaſtingly, for want of that aſ-
" ſiſtance which he afforded to that
" ſmall part*?"

THIS cannot be rationally ſuppoſed: nor does the ſacred ſcriptures teach any ſuch doctrine. They always repreſent the deity as having given to mankind univerſally the means of virtue and happineſs.—He has not any where left himſelf without witneſs of his care and kindneſs; or ever ſhewn any unwillingneſs *that all men ſhould come to the knowledge of the truth and be ſaved.* For where *men have no expreſs written law, they are a law to themſelves,* as they act up to the reaſon of their own minds. And another apoſtle could ſay, that he found of a truth, *that God is no reſpecter of perſons; but in every nation he that feareth God, and worketh righteouſneſs, is accepted of him.* Nor does either Jeſus Chriſt, or his apoſtles, ever once inſinuate, that men who enjoy the light of the goſpel, are not liable to periſh everlaſtingly, if they do not religiouſly uſe and improve that heavenly means of information. It would

* Page 24.

would therefore have been requiſite, that ſome ſuch *partiality* in God as this, which our author would inſinuate, did appear upon the face of the goſpel revelation. Without this, his argument has no weight in it.

But leſt *miracles* ſhould have any ſort of ſhadow of reaſon for having a place in the goſpel-ſyſtem, we are told, "The "rationality of its moral doctrines, and "the happineſs conſequent on the belief "and practice of them, are better rea-"ſons for their being embraced by men "of underſtanding, than miracles can "afford *."

Undoubtedly this is true; *viz.* So far as it would ſhew, that the internal, the intrinſic evidence, is, at this diſtance eſpecially, of more weight than the external: as we are more immediately capable of conſulting and critically examining the one than we are the other: and alſo becauſe the credibility of miracles could not have any place as atteſting the divine miſſion of a teacher, if his moral doctrines, and their felicitating tendency were not evident. But yet, this writer muſt give me leave to ſay, "That no "man can give credit to the teachings "of Jeſus Chriſt, as of divine authority, "who

* Page 26.

" who does not believe that he wrought " miracles." For they are all along expreſsly referred to by him in his teachings; but if he wrought no miracles, he certainly was an impoſtor.

ACCORDINGLY our author would have it to be " a more exalted idea of the " divine being, to ſuppoſe he never does " interfere at all; but governs his crea- " tures by general laws, ſuited to the " various relations they ſtand in to him " and to one another *."

THIS is again to connect ideas with miracle, which are quite foreign to its nature and deſign; as if the divine interpoſition was in proof that God does not govern his creatures by general laws, ſuited to the various relations in which they ſtand. Let our author produce one ſingle inſtance in proof of ſuch uſe or deſign of miracle, if he is able.

" I SHOULD now obſerve, he ſays, " *chriſtians* are ſo partial to themſelves, " or think God ſo partial to them, as " to believe that miracles have been " wrought in confirmation of the *Jewiſh* " and *Chriſtian* ſyſtems only †." —Here he thinks himſelf able to give a home-thruſt! Foraſmuch as he farther adds,— " Chriſtians allow of real miracles hav-

* Page 27. † Page 25.

" ing been wrought to eſtabliſh the Jew-
" iſh religion; and alſo allow of mira-
" cles being wrought in the chriſtian
" diſpenſation, in order to aboliſh the
" ceremonial part, at leaſt, of the Jewiſh
" ſyſtem. Is not this repreſenting the
" infinitely perfect God as being per-
" fectly capricious; as working miracles
" to *eſtabliſh* a religious ſyſtem, and again
" working miracles to *aboliſh it*?"

WITHOUT laying any ſtreſs on the miſtaken account given of the deſign of miracles in the one caſe and in the other, which undoubtedly were more properly intended to atteſt the divine miſſion of *Moſes* and of *Jeſus*, than to eſtabliſh the religion which they taught; I ſay, without expatiating on this, let it be conſidered, that the *ceremonial ſyſtem* which was aboliſhed at the eſtabliſhment of chriſtianity, was but a *local* and *temporary* ſyſtem; the which was originally intended to give way to a more univerſal and ſpiritual inſtitution. So that the *abolition* of the ceremonial was not at all within the intention of miracle; but what in the nature and reaſon of things muſt take place, upon the deſtruction of the Jewiſh nation and polity. Miracle, therefore, had nothing to do with this abolition.

THE

THE attempt to illuſtrate miracle by creation, or by creating, is extremely weak and impertinent.—"It muſt be as "eaſy for God to make a million of "creatures, as one creature.—To create "an arch-angel, as to create a fly*." This is ſaid in confutation of *Hume* and others, having ſpoken of *greater* and *leſs* miracles.—New Teſtament miracles, we are confident, have never been employed in creating, becauſe they never did produce any *new* ſpecies of beings.

BUT if miracle may not be employed in creating, yet, "if the happineſs of "mankind depended on the belief and "practice of the doctrine and precepts "contained in the bible, what could be "more worthy the exertion of infinite "power than to preſerve and ſecure this "*book* from miſtakes and corruptions?†"

WHATEVER biſhop *Butler*, or any other writer may have ſaid of the New Teſtament records, it does not appear, that they ever have, or ever will ſtand in need of any ſuch miraculous interpoſition for preſerving and ſecuring them from errors, interpolations, or corruptions. Their numerous verſions, the univerſal ſenſe of their divine authority has, and will preſerve them pure and unadulterat-

* Page 30. † P. 31.

ed to the laſt age of mankind; and their moral ſaving ſenſe can never be corrupted.—And with reſpect to little trifling differences, in the ſeveral moſt ancient copies, or in the various languages into which they have been tranſlated, the beſt critics have ſhewn, they are not of any importance, unleſs that of exciting and exerciſing the care and attention of the believing world, or of ſuch as reverence this divine revelation.

As to the different *kind* of hiſtorical evidence, I would obſerve, that that which reſpects *miracles*, and their credibility, muſt be ſuch as is perfectly ſuitable to their nature and deſign. And ſuch, in truth, is the evidence relative to the goſpel report of miracles. The very goſpel-records which convey to us ſuch reports, have interwoven ſuch miraculous facts, with the teachings of the great prophet; and ſhewn, in what great reſpects they did ſerve to atteſt his miſſion, what proof they did afford of the divine preſence with him, and how very clearly they did demonſtrate the certainty of his high appointments, whom God the father had thus ſealed.—Mr. *Hume*'s aſſertion ſhould be noticed, who ſays,—"No teſtimony is ſufficient to eſtabliſh "a miracle, unleſs the teſtimony be of

"ſuch

" ſuch a kind, that its falſehood would " be more miraculous than the fact " which it endeavours to eſtabliſh; and " even in that caſe, there is a mutual " deſtruction of argument, and the *ſu-* " *perior* only gives us an aſſurance ſuit- " able to that degree of force which re- " mains after deducting the inferior *."

In the caſe before us, I ſhould preſume to ſay, the falſehood about the reality of miracle, would be far more miraculous than the fact which the hiſtorical teſtimony endeavours to eſtabliſh: for when the ſon of God is ſaid to have referred his hearers to the teſtimony which the father gave of him, and bid them, if they refuſed to give him credit as the perſon whom God had promiſed to ſend among them, *yet to believe the works*: in conſequence of this, the falſehood gaining credit, would have been more miraculous than the fact which it would endeavour to eſtabliſh: *to wit*, if ſuch miraculous teſtimony had never exiſted, to which he did refer them, how extravagantly fanatical muſt he have appeared to be to the people, when he ſaid, *the works that I do, they bear witneſs of me, that the father hath ſent me*; had he never done any ſuch expreſſive and concluſive works!

It

* Page 39.

It will, I own, be to very little purpoſe, that any reaſonings are employed by us, upon the ſubject of miracles, in atteſtation of the divine miſſion of Jeſus, if the goſpel record be ſuppoſed a FORGERY, and the whole of its teachings, a LIE; which muſt inevitably be the caſe, if Jeſus Chriſt did not work any miracle. Nor is it in the power of all the *real deiſts* in the world to ſhew, how the goſpel-hiſtory could ever have obtained credit in any age, but upon the divine teſtimony of miracles, firſt wrought by our Lord, and afterwards by his apoſtles.

WE are however of opinion, with this "writer, That in religious concerns, "above all others, we ſhould be extreme-"ly cautious what we believe:—and it "is to be lamented, that inſtead of being "more careful in religious concerns, we "are much leſs ſo, than in the common "affairs of life.—We adopt creeds and "articles of faith, without examining "them, or requiring any proof of their "authenticity: and to ſave ourſelves "trouble we profeſs to believe, what it is "impoſſible we ſhould believe, becauſe "we cannot poſſibly know any thing "about it *."

ALL

* Page 39, 40.

ALL this is granted; and alſo that collective bodies of men have, in all ages, endeavoured to impoſe falſehood for truth, and to deceive their fellow-creatures in religious matters; at the ſame time we have all the moral certainty which can attend any fact, that the goſpel hiſtory cannot be falſe, and that it has never been under the management of deceivers, or impoſtors. *On the contrary*, that it is the moſt divine canon of truth and mercy which was ever given to men; and that by it all falſehood, deceit, and impoſture, all ſuperſtition, prieſtcraft, and wickedneſs, is moſt fully and efficaciouſly expoſed. We have alſo in it, the beſt diſcovery that ever was made of the *wiſdom* and *goodneſs* of God, in his moral kingdom and government; in the meaſures of his providence; and in the purpoſes of his love and mercy to mankind. Nor is our dependence on human teſtimony, that miracles have been wrought: but we have the fulleſt divine aſſurance, that they were what gave teſtimony to the miſſion of Jeſus.

OUR author confeſſes, that the chriſtians aſſign theſe *two* principal ends to miracles.

Firſt

" *First*, That they prove the perſon " performing them to be immediately " aſſiſted by divine power."

" *Secondly*, That miracles rouſe the " attention of beholders, and incline " them ſeriouſly to conſider the doctrines " and precepts of the perſon who bears " this heavenly commiſſion *."

But it ſeems " we are not to infer " the exiſtence of a thing from its *uſe-* " *fulneſs*. — For beaſts are not moral " agents, and therefore cannot commit " ſin, yet they ſuffer pain: now it " ſeems, that it would be good and uſe- " ful to them not to feel pain †." It ſeems ſo; to whom? Why, we ought to ſuppoſe it to this writer. But how comes it to paſs that this his groundleſs fancy ſhould be urged as an example, or illuſtration of any thing? Confident I am, he knows nothing of what he affirms. And I will aſk him this queſtion, Would it be good and uſeful that the pain of *hunger* and *thirſt* ſhould be taken from the beaſts? And whether he can prove, that they can ſuffer greater degrees of pain than they do in theſe appetites? Or whether he can tell what degrees of pleaſure are, or are not in balance of the pain they endure?—He is

* Page 44. † P. 45.

is not ſatisfied with this illuſtration, but proceeds to *moral agents*.—" We can " conceive it to be in the power of the " divine being, when our irregular paſ- " ſions lead us to immoral acts, ſo to im- " preſs our minds, as to take off the " force of the paſſion, by encreaſing the " force of a contrary paſſion, or other- " wiſe, and hence prevent the evil *."

HERE again I aſk, who are we that can conceive this? I know of none, who have any rational ideas either of God, as a moral governor, or of man, as a creature intended for a ſubjection to God's moral government; that have, or can have any ſuch conception. Man muſt be left a *free* agent, ſo far as he is moral; he ever was, and every where is in this condition. And hence this ſort of illuſtration is no manner of proof of what the author has advanced about the apparent *uſefulneſs* of a thing.

HOWEVER he goes on; " When the " Spaniards diſcovered *America*, and de- " ſtroyed ſo many millions of innocent " people in conſequence; it ſeems that " it would have been good and uſeful, " if God, by a miraculous interpoſition, " had prevented this cruel ſlaughter; " *hardly any thing can ſeem more worthy*

* Page 45.

" *of his goodneſs.* But he did not do " this; and yet how often have *prieſts* " repreſented him as interfering in tri- " fles, nay, even in fooleries * !"

It is too preſuming, methinks, to ſay, *hardly any thing can ſeem more worthy of God's goodneſs,* than that by a miraculous interpoſition to have prevented that cruel ſlaughter. This is to ſay things juſt as they riſe in the play of the imagination; and the *fort* of the argument is borrowed from *prieſtly impoſtures.* For, becauſe prieſts have repreſented God as thus interfering in trifles, *ergo* ſuch interpoſition was moſt worthy of his goodneſs. But this writer ought to have ſhewn that miracles were, in the ſacred text, ſaid to be wrought to deſtroy the freedom of moral agency, before he had introduced this illuſtration. Is not ſuch reaſoning very diſingenuous?

Indeed he ſays, " That it appears to " him, every interpoſition which affects " the conduct of man, ſo far violates " the freedom of man. Now if this " was done at one time, why might it " not be done at another time † ?"

Assured we are, ſuch violation of man's freedom never has been done by thoſe miracles which are recorded in the ſacred

* Page 46. † Ibid.

ſacred page.—The goſpel-hiſtory informs us, it was with the *conſent* of the people, that our Lord did miraculouſly treat them. And it aſſures us, that miracles did never injure the freedom of the human mind. Nay, that ſome had the *extraordinary gift* of working miracles in his name, who would be finally rejected by him, as workers of iniquity. But, alas! it has unhappily been the cuſtom of all writers againſt miracles, to combat ſome extravagant repreſentation of them. And if a learned defender has happened to make a wrong repreſentation, or any miſtake in his definition; or if the idea he had formed of the uſe or deſign of miracles was erroneous; this has furniſhed the unbeliever with the whole ſtrength of his argument.

See a plauſible advance made,—" By " denying particular interpoſitions we " preſerve our ideas of the juſtice and " uniformity of the conduct of the di- " vine being; as well as of our own free- " dom and intelligence: by admitting " them we deſtroy both, and make the " immutable God to appear as whimſi- " cal and capricious as we are ourſelves. " Horrid blaſphemy * !"

* Page 47.

WHAT is there in this more than mere declamation? Why, if interpoſitions were what violate the freedom of man, if they altered or diſturbed any one of the eſtabliſhed laws of nature, if they were made to atteſt incomprehenſible doctrines, or for any ends that are unworthy the majeſty of God, they would then deſtroy our ideas of the juſtice and uniformity of the divine being: but if, as we aſſert, they have ever been made in a perfect conſiſtency with all the eſtabliſhed laws of nature, and to atteſt a miſſion that would give the greateſt energy to the divine moral; the above reaſoning is quite fanciful and groundleſs! and the horrid blaſphemy has all its exiſtence in the horrid miſtake made of the nature, deſign, and end of miracles.

WE are next to conſider the *two* propoſitions.

Firſt, "Miracles prove the perſon "performing them to be immediately "aſſiſted by divine power." Here truly we are told "that if the ſcriptures are to "be believed, a very full, though ſhort "anſwer may be given to this propoſi- "tion; for from them, we are taught "to *deny* that the perſon performing of "a miracle is always aſſiſted by the im- "mediate power of the divine being;

"for

" for thoſe ſacred writings inform us, " that miracles have been performed by " evil ſpirits, and, apparently, in con- " firmation of diabolical impoſture *."

THIS indeed, if true, muſt be allowed to be a very full, though ſhort anſwer; and at once muſt ſhew the fallacy of the propoſition. But how is it exemplified? Why thus,—" Witneſs the devil's taking " Jeſus Chriſt up into an exceeding high " mountain, and ſhewing him all the " kingdoms of the world, &c. †"

WE ſhould obſerve,—*That* here he ſpeaks of the goſpel-hiſtory, under the venerable ſtyle of ſacred writings; and therefore one would have hoped, that a publiſher of his *thoughts on miracles* could not have diſcovered ſo much weakneſs and great diſingenuity, as to palm on his readers a manifeſt *viſionary* repreſentation, for a ſcenery of facts. This does not ſo well agree with the character of a *real deiſt*. He knows, or might know, that this piece of repreſentation cannot poſſibly be any other than *figurative*. But leſt he ſhould plead the general concurring ſenſe of chriſtian commentators, I will remind him of a rule or canon which every honeſt man ſhould take along with him, *viz.* " to read the ſcriptures by " the

* Page 47. † Ibid.

" the ſtandard of reaſon and nature; and " not by that of church-interpretations." There is no doing juſtice to thoſe ſacred writings in any other way of conſulting them. And thus they will always be found worthy of their divine original and character.

To the ſecond argument, " of mira- " cles rouzing the attention of behold- " ers, and inclining them ſeriouſly to " conſider the doctrines and precepts of " the perſon who bears this heavenly " commiſſion." His reply is, " *Firſt*, " the doctrines and precepts muſt be " rational and moral; becauſe ſuper-ra- " tional doctrines cannot be conſidered " by us to any good purpoſes *."

THIS is readily granted him.

BUT hence he would have us think, " that God would never *ſubvert* the law " of nature to inform us of the obliga- " tions we are under to perform moral " duties." He will conſtantly have it, that an exertion of omnipotence, which we have ſhewn, does no way injure any one law of nature, but is perfectly conſiſtent with all thoſe laws; and is alſo a manifeſt diſplay of the divine approbation of truth, righteouſneſs and goodneſs, is nevertheleſs what *ſubverts* the law of nature.

* Page 48.

nature. I would here aſk this writer what idea he can have of the divine being, which can put a negative upon his own influences and immediate interpoſitions, when all the laws of nature are nothing elſe, but his conſtant impreſſion, or the inceſſant, univerſal energy of omnipotence? Whereas, if miracles could be ſaid to produce effects which are repugnant to the ſyſtem of nature, if they did introduce *new relations*, or perplex the nature of moral obligation, then this writer might have ſomething to countenance that nugatory queſtion,—" Can it " be ſuppoſed that God would contradict " the eſtabliſhed laws of nature, in or- " der to teach us, *we ſhould do to others* " *as we would they ſhould do to us?*"— What contradiction was ever found in divine interpoſitions to the eſtabliſhed laws? Or when was a miracle wrought for any ſuch abſurd end and purpoſe?

" *Secondly*, Every moral doctrine and " precept hath the *ſeal of heaven* affixed " to it, nor can theſe want any addi- " tional authority *."

We are very willing to allow, that all moral obligation muſt be immutable and eternal. That the difference between right and wrong, truth and falſehood, good

* Page 49.

good and evil, are obvious to any one rational and unprejudiced obſerver, or careful examiner into the reaſon and relation of things. And alſo that the authority of *truth* is ſupreme. But then, we are as confident that the prejudices and prepoſſeſſions which have been thrown, as a ſable night, over mankind, in an age of univerſal depravity and greateſt degeneracy, may have ſo far *unlorded the commandment*, as to make it an act of divine wiſdom and goodneſs, to provide for a revival of its loſt energy, by giving commiſſion to a teacher of the heavenly doctrine, that ſhould expoſe the *ſuperſtition*, correct the *miſtaken apprehenſions*, remove the *ignorance*, and throw the light of evidence more vigorouſly into the underſtandings of mankind. And we cannot but look upon it as reaſonable, that ſuch a meſſenger, to whom God was pleaſed to bear teſtimony by miracle, ſhould call himſelf, *the light of the world!* and by declaring, that he delivered no doctrine but what he received from God the father; thus addreſs mankind in the ſtyle of indiſputable *authority*, as became a perſon, appointed of God to be the univerſal judge.

The *parable* which repreſents *Abraham* as ſaying, " that unleſs men did hear

Moſes

" *Moſes* and the *prophets*, neither would " they be perſuaded, though one roſe " from the dead;" is no kind of declaration againſt the truth of miracles; though this writer hath preſumed it is *. Their believing Moſes and the prophets, did, in truth, imply in it, their belief of miracles; and their refuſing to give them credit, was a vice of the mind that would not allow them to be impreſſed by a *meſſage*, though it had been ſent from the world of recompence.—I confeſs, I ſee no reference to miracle in the parable.

And, I cannot but ſay, it ſeems to be extremely preſuming upon the ignorance and inattention of his readers, that our author ſhould expect any man ſhould give him the leaſt credit, when he ſays, " Chriſt, *not only here*, but in various " other places, ſeems to diſcountenance " miracles, and the expectation of them; " and chuſes rather to depend on the " morality and uſefulneſs of his doc- " trine †." Very ſtrange it is, that an author, who calls himſelf a *real deiſt*, ſhould allow himſelf in ſuch ſportings of his imagination, when there are ſo many places in the goſpel hiſtory, known to every careful reader, where our Lord

* Page 49. † P. 50.

moſt expreſsly refers the people to his miracles, and reaſons with them upon that divine teſtimony. This writer refers us, indeed, to the 12th chapter of Mathew, " when a ſign was deſired of " him, he not only refuſed one, but " ſeverely reprimanded thoſe who aſked " it; ſtrongly intimating, that ſigns " and wonders would be of no uſe to " thoſe who would not regard his moral " doctrines. From the authority of " Chriſt, then, as well as from the " reaſon and nature of the thing, *mira-* " *cles* are ſo far from being neceſſary to " enforce moral duties, that they are " entirely *uſeleſs*; and therefore the ar- " gument made uſe of, in regard to the " rouzing the attention, is weak, if not " abſurd."

As to the place referred to, our bleſſed Lord does evidently no more than deny the claimants ſuch KIND of miracle as that which they demanded; *viz.* what ſhould be in proof of his being a temporal deliverer.—Neither would they have aſked him to have wrought ſuch a kind of miracle, if they had not been perſuaded of his having wrought other kinds of miracles.—*Again*, he does not deny or refuſe them miracle; but promiſeth, that one ſhall be given to that generation

of

of unbelievers, *viz.* that of his own reſurrection.

TRUE enough, we own it is, that miracles, ſigns, and wonders, are entirely *uſeleſs*, where no regard is paid to his moral doctrines; becauſe they were intended to atteſt his divine miſſion: but the inference is not juſt, that from the authority of Chriſt miracles are ſeen to be entirely uſeleſs. Should this very ſophiſtical writer ſay, he only meaneth they are uſeleſs, in oppoſition to their being neceſſary to enforce moral duties; we will not debate the matter with him: having already owned, that miracles leave the human mind abſolutely free, ſo far as it is moral. But then this is rather a quirk, or an unfair manner of reaſoning; as it manifeſtly changes the nature of the propoſition: for miracles may arouſe the attention of beholders, and is apt to incline them ſo far to gratify their raiſed curioſity, as to give an ear to what the perſon has to ſay, who bears the heavenly commiſſion: and yet, at the ſame time, he would find himſelf quite at liberty, either to receive, or to reject the doctrine which the divine meſſenger delivered. This appears to have been exactly the caſe, both with our Lord and with his apoſtles, in propagating the goſ-

pel. One may therefore very ſafely leave it to be ſhewn, that this end and deſign of miracles was uſeleſs: or, that the propoſition is either weak, or abſurd. Thouſands, and ten thouſands, were, by this means, excited to embrace the truth; and thereby became reformed, every where, from their idolatries and vices.

So far as *the belief of miracles* has been the ſource of miſchief in the Chriſtian world, the miracles were only the invention of prieſts, contrived in ſupport of falſehood, ſuperſtition, fraud, and impoſture: but this will by no means prove, that there never did exiſt real miracle. As well might any pretend to prove, there is no ſuch thing as true religion, becauſe there is ſo much ſuperſtition in the world. And, in my humble opinion, the pretended ſuppoſititious church-miracles, are a violent preſumptive proof of there having been real ones.

After this, our author ſays, "We "may well ſuppoſe that God would ne- "ver work a miracle, in order to eſta- "bliſh doctrines which are not to be "comprehended by our reaſoning facul- "ties.—For to ſuppoſe miracles were "ever wrought to enforce the belief of "*ſupernatural doctrines*, is certainly ab-

"ſurd;

" ſurd; becauſe juſt and rational ideas " of doctrines appear to be neceſſarily " connected with the idea of belief; and " to aſſent, without ſuch ideas, is to " aſſent to nothing: ſuch aſſent is not " belief, in the genuine ſenſe of the " word.—For no propoſition contrary " to reaſon, or not to be comprehended " by it, can poſſibly be believed *."

HERE our author is very clear. And as to the doctrine of the *trinity*, it confeſſedly is a very pertinent exemplification; for, aſſuredly, it cannot be a part of the religion of nature or of reaſon. Nor do I know of any *ſupernatural doctrines* which can be found in the New Teſtament; conſequently, here we are agreed.—Here we have no conttoverſy.

BUT ſorry I am, to find ſo unfair a definition given of Chriſtianity, as that which preſently follows.—" *Chriſtianity*, " as contained in the New Teſtament, " appears to be a ſyſtem of religion " partly rational and comprehenſible, " and partly ſuper-rational and incom- " prehenſible †"

How does he make this appear? Why he does it principally from the accounts given of chriſtianity by biſhop *Butler* and lord *Bacon*. Though he has not ſcrupled

* Page 52, 53. † Page 59.

ſcrupled to borrow ſome aſſiſtance from *Hume*'s Eſſay on Miracles, as it was very much to his purpoſe. He is ſo extremely good as to give us *five* characteriſtics of a Chriſtian, from lord *Bacon:* as great contradictions they are, as can be conceived. But to what purpoſe is all that either lord *Bacon* or biſhop *Butler* has ſaid, or a thouſand other lords or biſhops can ſay? They can never prove, that "*Chriſtianity*, as it lies in the New "Teſtament, is a ſcheme quite beyond "our comprehenſion*." From what they have ſaid, indeed, you may very eaſily prove, that, "Chriſtianity, *as it* "*lies in church creeds*, is a ſcheme quite "beyond our comprehenſion." But ſurely our author ought to have been much more wary and cautious, than to lay down that falſe definition, *viz*, "CHRIS-"TIANITY, *as it lies in the New Teſta-*"*ment, appears to be a ſcheme partly ſu-*"*perrational and incomprehenſible.*" This is too raſh and reproachful a definition, to be given of the beſt book in the world. A book that has done infinitely more ſervice to the cauſe of truth, and to the intereſts of real religion, than all the other books that ever were, or ever ſhall be written.

WHAT-

* Page 71.

WHATEVER may have been ſaid of Chriſtianity, either by *Bacon*, *Butler*, or *Bayle*, it can never be ſhewn, that there are any doctrines of the New Teſtament which are either *ſuper-rational* or *incomprehenſible*.

HERE I finiſh my obſervations upon the REAL DEIST's *thoughts on miracles*.

AND I would humbly refer them to his ſerious and impartial conſideration: in the ſpirit of friendſhip would aſk him, Whether the great objections which he has to miracles, did not ariſe from a miſrepreſentation and miſconception of their nature, deſign, and end?

ON the other hand, if he is able to ſhew the fallacy, or inconcluſiveneſs of theſe obſervations; I would then earneſtly deſire of him, that he will be pleaſed to render ſuch an open ſervice to the cauſe of truth.—Since he would thereby remove ſuch ſcruples as may poſſibly be raiſed in the unbeliever, by this publication; and induce yet greater numbers to reject the goſpel evidence; pouring that degree of contempt on Jeſus Chriſt which muſt be due, if he, in reality, be an *impoſtor*; and, conſequently, ſtrip him quite naked of all divine teſtimony. By this means, there will be a triumph obtained over the very name of chriſtian; and the

real

real deiſt will propagate his ſuper-excellent *creed*, conſiſting but of twenty articles, from the ſun's riſing to his going down.

Finally, The author of theſe remarks takes the liberty of ſaying, he has as great an averſion to all the extravagancies of *ſuperſtition*, *myſtery*, *prieſtcraft*, and *churchiſm*, as any real deiſt in the world can have: but, nevertheleſs, when he is winnowing the chaff from the wheat, he would not be ſo fanatical as to throw the wheat into the fire becauſe of the chaff.—At preſent he is fully perſuaded, that both MOSES and JESUS were divine meſſengers, teachers, and law-givers; and that each of them were honoured with the teſtimony of miracle. And he farther believes, that God did actually raiſe up Jeſus Chriſt from the dead, and gave him glory, in order that mankind might become REAL DEISTS; in other words, that their faith and hope might be in God.

Now may glory be to God in the higheſt! ſince there is, in the goſpel-revelation, the doctrine of peace on earth, and of good-will towards men.

Magna veritas eſt, et prævalebit.

THE END.

PART III.

Letters in defence of the Confeſſional, againſt ſundry writers.*

LETTER I.

Has a principal view to a converſation piece, in the London Magazine *of* Feb. 1767. *between* Statiotes *and* Philaleutheros.

THE great attention given to a book lately publiſhed under the title of *the Confeſſional*, cannot be matter of aſtoniſhment to ſuch, who, on the one hand form any right judgment of the intention of that book, and the effects which it promiſes to make upon ingenuous inquiring minds; or who, on the other hand, ſee what apprehenſions it muſt naturally raiſe in the minds of church-men, who perceive it to ſhake their rotten foundations.—In this ſtate of things, it may be reaſonably expected, that ſome efforts will be made, by maſters in ſcience, to parry off the ſtroke of evidence; and by the magic of church-ſorcery to con-

* N. B. At the end of *part* 1. I declined noticing the author of the eſſay, in his addreſs to the Confeſſional, deſigning to add the following letters.

jure up the prejudices of the people againſt the attempt of a *farther reformation*.

HENCE it is that the author of the confeſſional is accuſed, "of *rudely* quarrelling "with almoſt every particular in *our* "*church*—the model—the diſcipline— "the doctrine—and with wanting rather "to ſet up an entire *new* one, than to "improve the old," tho' I can aſſure the writer of the converſation-piece, that one of the greateſt dignitaries in the church ſome years ago, thus expreſſed himſelf, upon my ſaying to him, that I wondered there was not ſome reform made for the relief of many of the uneaſy conſcientious clergy—he replied, "remove "a pin, and the whole building will "fall."—which, if the caſe, it muſt be confeſſed, that the author of the Confeſſional, is not very unreaſonable, if that ſhould be his opinion, which Philaleutheros has repreſented.

BUT the more effectually to render the above writer obnoxious, he is ſaid to be quite *puritanical*, "he ſeems indeed to "think none *conſcientious*, but the *poor* "*conſcientious puritans*,—good natured, "charitable ſoul." Thus ſneers the haughty prieſtly pen, briſtles and ſnorts over the *Confeſſional*, do you aſk what abſurdity

dity he woud fix upon it? why truly a judicious obſervation is recollected of Mr. *J. Clarke*'s in his reply to Dr. *Chandler*; "Mr. Chandler and his brethren plead "only for aboliſhing ſubſcription to the "*explanatory principles of the church of* "*England*, without inſiſting on another "to the *aſſemblies' catechiſm*, or articles "of their own drawing up; and yet, "perhaps, if they could think ſuch a "thing would go down, they might not "diſapprove of ſuch a ſubſcription."— Where the propriety of this obſervation lies, is not ſo very eaſy to be found; unleſs the author meaneth, its apt tendency to raiſe the indignation of the ignorant bigot, who raves about the perfection of our church conſtitution! for, in truth, it is quite foreign to the argument, as it has to do with the *Confeſſional*, and likewiſe to the deſire of every conſiſtent proteſtant-diſſenter, to have ſubſcription of any kind continued, for all ſubſcriptions are no other than marks of ſlavery.—But, be this as it may, the idea of a total abolition of ſubſcription is very apparently held in abhorrence by the pen which cenſures the *Confeſſional*; the author of which *Confeſſional* is accuſed of having forgotten the TOLERATION.— This, again, is playing the ſorcerer; for,

pray, what end can it anſwer to keep in remembrance the toleration, but that of giving a truly good mind great pain to think of churchmen, who would be called *chriſtians*, preſuming to TOLERATE every whit as good chriſtians as themſelves, in the religious exerciſe of their reaſon and underſtanding?—How prepoſterous!—Whereas, were they truly ſenſible and modeſt, and at all acquainted with the natural rights of mankind, or with that *liberty wherewith Jeſus Chriſt has made all his diſciples free*, they would never mention the toleration but with ſome ſign of grief and ſorrow, as well as bluſhing, that it has ſo much as a *name* among proteſtants; and much more that it has a *meaning* in their behaviour towards one another. For God's ſake let us know *what* and *who* they are that aſſume a ſovereignty over the rights of conſcience?

AYE, but ſtay a little, and you may make ſome gueſs:—*Toleration*,—why *toleration* is the hedge ſet about profits, preferments, and dignities, &c. there are certain conditions ſpecified in this bleſſed act of toleration, which ſecure the *loaves* and the *fiſhes* to the ſubſcribing ſons of an eccleſiaſtical eſtabliſhment. Conſequently, if any ſhould pretend to annihilate

annihilate the *act of toleration*, he would render theſe *rich morſels* quite common and prophane.

It is matter of much pleaſantry to obſerve, that the *cleric* mentions theſe delicious things with the moſt exquiſite reliſh; and yet, at the ſame time, deplorably forgetting his own morſel, the tranſported man very abſurdly breaks out in this ſtrain of devotion,—*would to God they would* ALL *come into it, and enjoy its emoluments!*

In truth, the miſtake of great numbers of our church-men is, that they annex the idea of civil power to religious profeſſion: which certainly is a notorious ſoleciſm. They muſt have known better, had they but honeſtly conſulted a late Engliſh prelate, who has unanſwerably ſhewn, there can be no alliance between church and ſtate; becauſe *Chriſt's kingdom is not of this world* *.—Other prelates have indeed united the two poles, and have virtually affirmed, that when Jeſus Chriſt ſaid, *my kingdom is not of this world*, he really meant it *to be in ſtrict alliance with the world*.—Indeed the chriſtians' Lord did inſtitute a memorial rite, to be religiouſly celebrated in honour of his victory over the world even in his death.

* Dr. Benj. Hoadley, of honourable memory.

death. But yet, we are referred to biſhop ELLYS's tracts, the better to be convinced, that this ſacramental-teſt ought to qualify chriſtian men for worldly emoluments.—We are alſo directed to RAPIN, in order to prove, that, "whatever party of chriſtians are uppermoſt, "they will exerciſe ſovereignty over "others." And yet, no reaſoning whatever can be more fallacious; for not any thing is in a higher degree incompatible with the chriſtian profeſſion, than for chriſtians to imitate pagan idolaters, in the exerciſe of lordſhip and dominion; or, in giving law to conſcience.

IN a word, if I have read the *Confeſſional* with underſtanding, if I can conceive and comprehend its deſign, the author has no views of monopolizing either the favour of God, or that of his prince; but would plead the univerſal and unalienable rights of chriſtians againſt the exorbitant and fanatical claims of church-men.—If I have miſtaken him, as I have no ill-will towards him, or any man, it is preſumed he will forgive me. But if a fair judgment has been made by me, of the glorious intention of the *Confeſſional*, it will follow, that all *Britons*, who are not under an infatuation, will hold in ſovereign contempt, every prieſtly

or

or prelatical meaſure uſed to depreciate one of the beſt defences of chriſtian liberty, in point of confeſſions, that this nation has, in any age, produced.

LETTER II.

The idea of toleration in matters of religion, uſed as an argument againſt the Confeſſional; and the claims of a majority in matters of religion, ſhewn to be unreaſonable.

PHILALEUTHEROS, a church-advocate, lately retained, to the purpoſe of impleading and vilifying the *Confeſſional*, we have already found objecting to any further reform in the national-church-eſtabliſhments, leſt her ſons ſhould be gulled into a renunciation of power; or, leſt they ſhould be perſuaded to part with her profits, preferments and dignities. Theſe he repreſents as the *envied rich morſels, at which men's mouths are watering*. Not any thing truly is more natural, than for a man to expreſs himſelf according to his moſt predominant taſtes and feelings.—Enquire we, however, into his *capital* defenſive plea: it is this. "Some ſect or denomination "will ever be uppermoſt, and if any

"other

"other than the church of England was "ſo, they would not only act the ſame "part in reſpect to emoluments, &c. "but they would not equally *tolerate* "the church of England, as they are "tolerated by it.—Is not there as much "reaſon for them, as for us to be con-"tent with a toleration?"

HOWEVER ſpecious and popular this plea, it has no foundation in reaſon or nature. The great law of *truth* abſolutely condemns the principle: for we are aſſured, from the univerſal voice of hiſtory, that *truth* never yet had her pavillion with the uppermoſt.—But unleſs it can be proved, that reaſon and truth are always to be found with the majority, in the exerciſe of power; it can never be ſhewn, that they have any right to give law to the minority, in matters of religion. So that ſhould we admit the majority may confer their ſpecial favours on a ſet of men, who are to wear their liveries, and obſerve a certain form and mode of ritual and ceremony; yet even that would be no reaſon at all why the minority ſhould be laid under an equal tax with themſelves, for the ſupport of their own favourite order of clergy. Surely it can be no other than an open viola-

violation of the great law of equity, to impoſe ſuch exactions upon them.

Philaleutheros does, himſelf, bitterly complain of ſuch a ſuppoſed ſituation, as that of having his church in ſuch a ſtate, as to be only tolerated by the majority of any denomination. He cannot endure to think of the very diſagreeable ſituation. Nevertheleſs, he would have the minority content with a *toleration*.—There is indeed a manifeſt impropriety in his plea, when he ſays, that "another ſect "being uppermoſt would not equally "tolerate *the church of England*." Here he ſadly forgets himſelf; foraſmuch as whatever ſect, in this part of the iſland, ſhould be uppermoſt, it would, upon his own ideas of a national church-eſtabliſhment, be as properly the *church of England*, as the preſent uppermoſt ſect now is.

YET this, by no means will be allowed to furniſh a reaſon for ſuch a ſtatute law as that called, *An Act of Toleration*, which ſecures to the uppermoſt ſect all profits, preferments, and dignities; becauſe every of the other ſects in the minority, who are, at leaſt, equally good ſubjects of civil government, muſt have equal claim to civil emoluments with thoſe of the national-church-eſtabliſh-

ments.—And in point alſo of religious qualification, the majority can pretend to as little pre-eminence in the diſcovery of truth, even their own clergy themſelves, being judges. I will cite a few unqueſtionable authorities: ſuch as the late biſhop of *Wincheſter*, Dr. BENJAMIN HOADLEY's *Common Rights of Chriſtians*; and his *Anſwer to the Repreſentation, &c.* alſo, a ſermon, preached by the preſent biſhop of *Oxford* *, when at Durham, in 1758. "The only means, *ſays he*, by "which religious knowledge can be ad-"vanced, is, *freedom of enquiry*: an "opinion is not therefore falſe, becauſe "it contradicteth received notions: but "whether true or falſe, let it be ſub-"mitted to a free examination: truth "muſt, in the end, be a gainer by it, "and appear with the greateſt evidence. And, in the year 1746, I well remember, that Dr. *Arrowſmith* was heard to ſay in his pulpit, at St. *Olave's*, that—"he was grieved that any of his bre-"thren ſhould call in queſtion the vali-"dity of Preſbyterian miniſters ordina-"tion."—And he recommended to his people to live in love with the proteſtant diſſenters; "for, he ſaid, he looked up-"on them as the *great buttreſs* of the "pro-

* Dr. *Lowth*.

" proteſtant cauſe*."—I will add, another teſtimony of very great weight; and that is, of the preſent learned biſhop of *Glouceſter*, who, in his ſermon preached at Briſtol, Nov. 29, 1759, has this addreſs, " With regard to our brethren, " the proteſtant ſectaries of more ancient " date, who, *from various accidents*,† " have long diſſented from the eſtabliſhed " worſhip, and are now ſecured in their " natural rights by the fundamental laws " of the conſtitution, we of the national " church ſhould ſhew, by all brotherly " acts of love and kindneſs, that the " toleration given them by the law, does, " in our ſenſe, add honour to the goſ- " pel, as well as ſtrength and ſafety to " a free community: more eſpecially " ſhould theſe diſpoſitions be manifeſted " to that ſounder and far more conſider- " able part of the ſeparation, the PRES- " BYTERIAN.—As we both profeſs to " be under the ſame *ſhepherd*, we ſhould " not, ſure, make one another uneaſy " becauſe we lodge in different folds."

THESE are good and valid evidence, that the ſons of the national church can have no ſort of pre-eminence, even as to

* Had I leave given me, I could here open a ſcene of prieſtly bigotry, which gave the occaſion.

† Very droll.

religious profeſſion, any more than in the principles of civil allegiance. And we might add, that as the minds of thoſe of the ſeveral proteſtant diſſenting ſects are *more at liberty* than the ſons of the national church can be, from the ſordid bribe, and the worldly biaſs; it ſhould follow, that in point of qualification, *as ſons of truth*, their claims to civil advantages muſt, at leaſt, be equal.

HERE we may obſerve, it is a fundamental error in the reaſoning of *Philaleutheros*, to imagine, that *power of legiſlation*, ever was, or ever can be inveſted in any chriſtian church; or, that *pre-eminence* ever was, or ever can be allowed a place among the miniſters of Chriſt, or the teachers of his doctrine. If the goſpel be true, chriſtians can have on earth neither *maſter* nor *father*. They can have no law-giver nor judge: but they are all brethren. No clergy whatever, nor civil magiſtrate, can, by any artificial manufactured alliance, give law to conſcience, in religious matters. *Church-power*, about which men rave ſo much, is a very ridiculous, though an enchanting dream, which has intoxicated many; and ſo generally depraved and debaſed the idea of chriſtianity.

How-

However, we ſeem to have refined and improved much of late, in the arts of clerical, deluſive colourings.—See the matchleſs addreſs of the *Canon-reſidentiary of St.* Peter's, *Exeter*, in his ſermon at *Lambeth* chapel, June 15, 1766, publiſhed by command of his Grace of Canterbury.—"If men will envy biſhops "thoſe honours and emoluments that "ſtrike the eye, why do they not likewiſe envy them their cares and labours "which lie behind the ſcenes; their "anxieties and diſquietudes, their con"finements and interruptions, and the "ſacrifices they make of time and health, "and eaſe, and domeſtic comfort, to "the important duties of their ſtation? "Painful pre-eminence! So far is it "from being an object of envy, of ambi"tion, or of competition; ſo far are "the little advantages and diſtinctions "attending it from compenſating its "toils and embarraſſments, that this "world has no equivalent to give for "them."—Under the roſe, this Canon is a notorious lampooner.

But might not *Philaleutheros*, nevertheleſs, look upon this humiliating portrait, and correct himſelf a little about his *envied rich morſels!* Nay, ought he not to abate much of his rage againſt the Con-

Confeſſional? Aſſuredly, if he gives the Canon-reſidentiary any credit, as, in earneſt, he muſt change his language, and inſtead of *ſweet*, call them *bitter morſels*. The great rank and elevated condition of a biſhop is to excite pity, juſt as would that of the *galley-ſlave*, or the unhappy priſoner in the inquiſition! Nor do I know how we could moderate the painful concerns, were it not that we know, they might very eaſily have avoided the diſtreſs.

THIS clerical ſtating of the little advantages of a toleration-act, which only ſecures a *bed of thorns* for the moſt exalted of the ſons of the national church-eſtabliſhments, when examined and depicted in *Lambeth* chapel, we, methinks, might hope, that the doughty advocate would harangue no more in defence of church-privileges, preferments, and dignities; but, on the contrary, very willingly allow the other ſects to divide the ſpoil, and go ſnacks with them in their drudgeries. And yet, it is to be apprehended, the *Exeter* Canon's very burleſque account of the matter will aſk for ſome further explication, and not ſuffer our hopes to become very ſanguine.

HOWEVER, if *Philaleutheros* will yet defend a *toleration-law*, let him make it evident,

evident, that thoſe very men of the majority, who preſume to have a power of controuling the thinking and judging faculties of mankind, have alſo an indiſputable inherent right to determine the liberty men ſhall have to breathe; and alſo to eat their food, when hungry; or to drink, when athirſt.—Unleſs he can produce ſuch an *authority* inveſted with any man, or any order of men, let him not preſume to make any more mention of *church-power*: or plead for the exerciſe of prieſtly dominion over conſcience. Let him rather conſult the opinion of the great LOCKE upon the toleration-act, in his letter to *Limborch*, inſerted in the preface of the laſt fine edition of *Locke's Letters*, 4to. 1765,—and thereby correct his extravagant imagery.

LETTER III.

The very weak effort of the enemies of the Confeſſional farther expoſed: wherein Philaleutheros's Conceſſion, the Oxford detecting Letter, and Dr. Ibbetſon's Criticiſm are noticed.

THE very alarming deſign of the Confeſſional, which would propoſe a farther reform in the church, has occa-

occaſioned many clerical attempts to confute, or rather to conceal its reaſoning from the eye of the public. Contemptible enough are theſe efforts, however they may ſerve the ends of thoſe who obſtinately decline all meaſures of a reforming nature: or, however theſe labourers may be rewarded by *mitres* and *prebends*, &c. Any unprejudiced perſon who reads the controverſy between the *Eſſex Arch-deacon*, and the conforming clergyman his opponent, will plainly perceive, the Arch-deacon is diſarmed of all his weapons, and fairly beat out of the field.—And as to the *Oxford Letter*, in the London Magazine of March 1767,* where the writer fancied to have given a deep cut, by one lunge, at the vitals of the Confeſſional, *viz.* by telling us that MOSHEIM has been therein ignorantly or wilfully miſrepreſented; and that, in truth, *Moſheim* meant, by the terms *Eccleſia Gallicana*, the French Hugonots.—The Oxonian fencer has thereby expoſed himſelf to the deriſion of all men of common ſenſe. For one may be abſolutely certain, he would be hiſſed out of the college, ſhould he inſiſt upon it, that at this very day, *Eccle-*

ſia

* The firſt article; called, *The Confeſſional detected.*

ſia Anglicana muſt be underſtood to mean, the *proteſtant diſſenters!* And yet, the abſurdity is altogether as glaring in the one caſe, as it is in the other. However this is only an Oxonian flying thruſt. I ſuppoſe he belongs to the light horſe in the church. As to *Philaleutheros*, he ſeems now to be greatly humbled, and to be meeting the Confeſſional half way: for he ſays, in the ſecond part of his dialogue, "he wiſhes to ſee any real "and juſt matter of complaint reſpect-"ing ſubſcription removed, by reducing "the articles to be ſubſcribed, and con-"fining them to a *few* of the moſt ge-"nerally admitted, clear, and influenc-"ing points of chriſtianity: never taking "any point attended with great intrica-"cies and difficulties, ſuch as to *be-"wilder* honeſt and learned men into the "number; or if any ſuch be taken in, "confining the articles reſpecting *theſe*, "ſtrictly to ſcripture words, and no "other: which indeed is juſt the ſame "as *no ſubſcription:* as it affects no one "of all the different perſuaſions which "are fathered upon ſcripture, by affix-"ing ſenſes to the purpoſe of their "ſchemes on the words of ſcripture*."

* London Magazine, March 1767.

EVERY one may ſee, that the amount of this propoſal, is, a virtually giving up the whole argument for ſubſcription; ſince points of *intricacy* and *difficulty* are ſtrictly to be confined to ſcripture words, and no other, which is juſt the ſame as no ſubſcription.—We are at liberty then to draw this concluſion, *viz.* Since it has been ſhewn, in a former letter, that there is an *equality* among Chriſtians, which cannot admit of any pre-eminence in point of authority or power, conſidered as ſuch; and conſequently there muſt ariſe an unſurmountable difficulty about ſubſcriptions; for-as-much as it is impoſſible to ſhew, *who* they are that can have a right to require and impoſe them. Here it is the whole matter manifeſtly hinges, and unleſs *Philaleutheros* is able to cut the *Gordian-knot*, all his farther reaſonings or argumentations on the ſubject will be extremely idle and impertinent.—So much for *Philaleutheros*.

BEHOLD another publication comes out againſt the *Confeſſional*, entitled, *a plea for ſubſcription*, by Dr. *Ibbetſon*, in which performance there is a train of artificial management, which may, by no means, be overlooked in our defence of the *Confeſſional*.

THIS

THIS ſon of the church plainly ſaw a mill-ſtone hanging on the neck of *the alliance between church and ſtate:* and he is preſumptuous enough to conclude himſelf able, by the touch of his finger, or by a ſlight of hand, to remove it out of the way.—"It is difficult, *ſays he*, to "underſtand our Saviour's words, at the "time when he was arraigned before "Pilate—*my kingdom is not of this world*, "in a ſenſe declaratory of the true na-"ture of the church of Chriſt here "upon earth."

DIFFICULT, Dr.—to whom?—to the ſons of a civil church eſtabliſhment:—granted: it is of exceedingly hard digeſtion to its advocates. It cannot be otherwiſe.—But the doctor ſhall give us his reaſon.—"The expreſſion εκ του κοσμου is op-"poſed to εκ του πατρος 1 *John* ii. 16. and to "εκ του Θεου 1 *John* iv. 4, 5, 6. And "hence the paſſage has been underſtood "by ſome, to reſpect the divine origin "of Chriſt's kingdom, and this may be "the more probable, becauſe the words "were addreſſed to Pilate, and have no "relation to the prejudices of our Lord's "diſciples, concerning his temporal king-"dom; and indeed theſe prejudices were "ſo ſtrong in their minds, that our "Saviour did not much endeavour to

"contradict them, whilſt he was upon
"earth; much leſs did he attempt it in
"the laſt melancholy period of his life,
"becauſe, they could not then have
"borne it."

A criticiſm of our learned doctor, aukwardly laboured to throw duſt into the eyes of his readers; it has no poſſible ſenſe nor meaning, but a bad one: and that is, it makes our Lord appear very abſurd and ridiculous, in his anſwer to *Pilate*. Pray, good doctor, let me aſk you one plain queſtion, why ſhould our Lord once think of telling *Pilate* any thing about the divine origin of his kingdom, or intimate any thing about his heavenly kingdom, when he was to ſatisfy him concerning a plain matter of fact, of which the Jews had accuſed him; *viz.* that of being an enemy to *Cæſar*; and of ſetting up a kingdom on earth, in injury to his rights of exerciſing dominion? Any common reader may clearly ſee, what *Pilate* wanted to know of him, was, whether he had any claims to ſovereignty among men, that would rival it with *Cæſar*? No, ſays Chriſt, I have none, *my kingdom is not of this world.* —I have nothing at all to do with the exerciſe of *civil* power, mine is only a ſpiritual kingdom, which I ſhall erect

in

in the hearts of men, mine is a kingdom of truth; and to this I am going to witneſs with my blood.—No ſooner does *Pilate* know, that he only pretended to be a ſpiritual king, and to exerciſe his government in a kingdom of truth; but he is for acquitting him.

WHAT the doctor meaneth by ſaying, "that the words could have no relation "to the prejudices of our Lord's diſci"ples concerning his temporal king"dom,"—is not of very eaſy conception;—for the reverſe ſeems very apparent to be the truth of the caſe. It could be no other view of him, that was able to alarm *Pilate*, as concerned to ſecure the rights of *Cæſar*, and it is becauſe our Lord's *accuſers* perſiſt in it, that unleſs *Pilate* did condemn him, he would ſhew himſelf to be an enemy to *Cæſar*, that he is perſuaded to paſs ſentence of death upon him.

AND yet our doctor adds, "this leads "me rather to conſider the words as de"ſcriptive of the future ſtate of Chriſt's "kingdom in heaven: the true king"dom of the Meſſiah; where being ſet "at the right hand of God, he ſhould "ſend forth from thence the holy ſpirit "to inſtruct and govern his people."—Quite foreign to the deſign of the Roman governor's

governor's queſtion—yet the doctor would make our Lord tell *Pilate* of things, concerning which he was no way qualified to form any kind or ſort of idea, and rather than allow that Chriſt has a kingdom erected among men, or that he is actually a king in his church, our critic has found out a vicegerent for him, whom he calls *the holy Spirit*.—Whether this be agreeable to his church-creeds, it behoves the doctor to examine;—one thing, I will preſume to ſay, the doctor's criticiſm is very contemptible, and carries along with it its own confutation; if he would take my advice, he will no more expoſe himſelf in ſuch ſilly, weak, and vain attempts, to reconcile Chriſt's church and kingdom, with the policies of this world; which is his aim.—Let him more carefully read the goſpels, and he will find, that our bleſſed Lord frequently took much pains to cure his diſciples of that prejudice which they had imbibed about the worldly nature of his kingdom: and more eſpecially, in his finiſhing inſtructions.—

I do not take leave of the doctor having ſomething farther to ſay to him, in a following letter.

LETTER

LETTER IV.

Dr. IBBETSON's *Plea for Subſcription examined; relative to the ſpirit of the church-eſtabliſhment, the nature of its authority, and what reſignation is required of the ſubſcriber.*

THE confuſion thrown, by this writer, upon the anſwer which *Jeſus* made to *Pilate*, has been already conſidered. We ſhall now proceed to notice the Doctor's boaſts of the church of England, which are in this ſtrain;—"She profeſſes *higher views* than to eſta-"bliſh herſelf in peace and quiet upon "the earth, by engaging mankind in "an outward acknowledgement of chriſ-"tianity, by the means of *temporal re-"wards* and puniſhments.—And ſhe de-"clares inſtruction, exhortation, and ad-"monition, to be the only legitimate "means of advancing and preſerving the "true religion of Chriſt*." However this is not ſo very intelligible, though one would think it plain enough, ſince the Doctor talks of "rights, which the "ſubjects of an eſtabliſhed religion have, "in virtue of the eſtabliſhment, that are "upon

* Plea for Subſ. page 15.

" upon the ſame footing as other rights " of a civil nature*," And *again*, he ſays, " a change of opinions, after men " have ſubſcribed the articles of religion, " is virtually diſclaiming their ſubſcrip- " tion, which admitted them into their " function and preferments." *More-over*, " the church wiſheth them not to " retain her *emoluments*, which they are " entitled to no longer than they make " good their only voluntary engage- " ments †."

How does it now appear, that the church profeſſes *higher views* than that of engaging mankind in an outward acknowledgment of chriſtianity, by the means of temporal rewards and puniſhments; when ſhe does ſo expreſsly claim *peculiar* civil rights and emoluments, by virtue of her eſtabliſhment?—And beſides this, when " ſhe even claims a " right to *grant* ſuch temporal advan- " tages, as are implied in the notion of " an eſtabliſhment ‡."—This is much too enigmatical for my underſtanding to comprehend.—Can a contradiction be made more explicit?

WELL, but the better to reconcile men to *eſtabliſhed confeſſions*, by which the ſubſcriber may become a candidate for theſe temporal advantages, the Doctor tells

* Page 14. † Page 17, 18. ‡ Page 15.

tells us,—" that theſe being human com-
" poſitions, ſhe (the church) acknow-
" ledges them to be ſubject to the exa-
" mination of every intelligent Chriſtian,
" with the ſcriptures before him. And
" all this is very conſiſtent with the au-
" thority, which ſhe claims nevertheleſs,
" of interpreting the ſcriptures for all
" her members, who being perſons of
" ſound judgment, and knowing their
" obligations to comply with or diſſent
" from the eſtabliſhment, did, in the
" inſtant of determining for themſelves,
" in voluntarily ſubſcribing or receiving
" her eſtabliſhed confeſſion, *exclude them-*
" *ſelves from the right of private judg-*
" *ment*, and ſubmit to the authority of
" the church, not as an infallible autho-
" rity, but as an authority of order."*

THIS is a very extraordinary, nay, it is a moſt wonderful ſophiſm. However it openly confeſſes, that in the act of ſubſcribing, men do actually exclude themſelves from the right of private judgment, and ſubmit to the authority of the church's interpretation of the ſcriptures. Here the doctor is aware, that in the article of ſubſcribing, there is no ſort nor kind of difference between his church and the papal church, the ſpirit and principle of ſubſcribing being

* Ibid p. 16.

one and the ſame in both. This ruffles him a little; and he wriggles about till he finds out ſomething, which he would have underſtood, as a diſtinction—"Sub-"mits to the authority of the church; "*not as an infallible authority, but as an* "*authority of order*:"—But for God's ſake, what kind of relief will this give a mind that knows how to reaſon, and will not admit of a diſtinction where there is no difference? a mind, that dares not think of reſigning the *rights of private judgment* to any authority whatſoever, muſt be aſtoniſhed beyond meaſure at the idea. Let us however examine the jeſuitical feigned diſtinction, what does *the authority of order* require of us? why, "that we conclude ourſelves from the "right of private judgment, and ſubmit "to the authority of a church which in-"ſiſts upon a claim ſhe has of interpreting "the ſcriptures for all her members."—Pray doctor, what is it that an infallible authority can do more? not one iota more.—The *authority of order*, Sir, makes the very ſame impious and ſhocking extenſive demand with the authority of infallibility; the one cannot exceed the other a tittle in the ſacrilegious homage that is required.—The authority of order, extends her claim to the interpret-

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ing of the ſcriptures for all her members, an infallible authority cannot go one ſtep farther.

THE rope, doctor, is of your own twiſting; and you muſt whether you will or no, undergo the ſtrangling;—for it is mere chicanery for you to mention, *eſtabliſhed confeſſions being ſubject to the examination of every intelligent Chriſtian, with the ſcriptures before him*; when, in the very act of ſubſcribing, he excludes himſelf from *the right of private judgment* and impiouſly acknowledges the church's haughty inſolent claims of a right to interpret ſcripture for all her members!

THE doctor will nevertheleſs explain to us what he meaneth by *church authority*, and he ſpeaks thus of it,—"nor "does the church in all this matter claim "any *legiſlative power* as her own, if at "any time ſhe ſeems to exerciſe ſuch an "authority, it is in alliance and concur-"rence with ſtate."* And again,—"was "it ever heard of, that the civil ſanction, "which alone makes any conſtitution "to have the force of a law, gives it any "other authority than a civil one?" † So far are we inſtructed in the notion we are to form of church power, in the article of *legiſlative authority*, we are told,

* p. 18. † p. 19.

it intends that ſort of power which it derives from the civil magiſtrate; which therefore muſt be a civil authority, or, perhaps, the doctor would have it a *complex* idea; *i. e.* the authority of church and ſtate united, or in alliance and concurrence.

YET, here we muſt be very cautious, and not aſcribe a ſuperiority even to the HEAD of the church, though our liturgy ſhould happen to ſay, *over all cauſes*, eccleſiaſtical and civil, ſupreme! for our doctor very pertly ſays, "I "know of no power in the crown, "to diſpenſe with the eccleſiaſtical, "any more than the civil law of the "realm." * — Church authority, then, notwithſtanding its alliance with the ſtate, muſt be placed in an abſolute *independency* on the civil power. And though I am not able to gueſs at what it meaneth, yet none of thoſe clergy who ſubſcribe to her eſtabliſhed articles, ſhould, on that account, reproach my ignorance; ſince let it mean whatever it may, they themſelves have ſacrificed to its myſterious majeſty, *the rights of private judgment*.

To make thorough work of the plea for clerical ſubſcription, the ſubtle equivocating

* Page 32.

vocating Doctor tells us, "there can "be no room to complain of *prevari-* "*cation*, if men of different notions "unite in ſubſcribing forms wherein "a lenity of interpretation was in- "tended, as the legiſlator has not "thought fit to determine in what "particular ſenſe the ſubſcriber ſhall "give his aſſent."*—"moſt probably, "ſays he, there are ſtill *Calviniſtical* "and *Arminian* divines of the church "of England; and a more numerous "tribe of other denominations, wh, "though all of the ſame confeſſion, "do not perhaps exactly agree in opi- "nion with regard to many of the "thirty-nine articles of religion, yet "they all ſubſcribe to them without "any diverſity of opinions; that is, "in the ſenſe of *varying from the arti-* "*cles*; *not of differing from each other.*"†

IT muſt move ones concern to ſee what wretched ſhifts learned advocates for an eſtabliſhed ſubſcription are put to in their defence.—Can the greateſt proficient from St. OMERS produce any thing more Sophiſtical, or Jeſuitical? —To this bleſſed end do ſubſcriptions ſerve, *viz.* to prevent diverſity of opinions, by admitting and encouraging them.—

* Page 25. † Page 34.

THESE Letters, allowing for ſome alterations, have appeared in the London Chronicle, under the ſignature of, *Philo-Confeſſional*; the two laſt ſeem to have occaſioned the *Arch-deacon of St. Albans* to give his pamphlet the honour of a ſecond edition, at leaſt, *a new title page*, at the back of which is an *advertiſement*, wherein he is pleaſed to ſay, "the author is not at all affected, "any more than his argument, by the "miſrepreſentations and illiberal abuſe "of a news-paper letter-writer without a name."—The writer of thoſe very letters is willing to hold them up in this form to the eye of the public; that they may ſee whether they are or not; nor is he concerned at, or afraid of any critical cenſure; much leſs, of the *Arch-deacon of St. Alban's confutation.* —He likewiſe fancies himſelf free from the charge of miſrepreſentation and illiberal abuſe; and his not giving his name, he hopes has had no ill effect on his reaſoning.——

I ſhall conclude this pamphlet, with making but one reflection, *viz.* —— Whoſoever impartially conſiders what

what are the fundamentals of a civil eſtabliſhment of religion; and the unreaſonable and extravagant nature of church-claims in point of ſubſcriptions; cannot much wonder at their apt tendency to unſettle the minds of men, and to lead them into doubtings and infidelity: for when once *abſurdity* becomes eſtabliſhed under the idea of a chriſtian church, how readily will an infidel mind entrench and enjoy itſelf in its own abſurdity? Had not this been the caſe, I am humbly of opinion, we had never been preſented with ſuch a train of indigeſted crude *Thoughts on Miracles*, as thoſe aſſuredly are, which we have been conſidering in the ſecond part of this publication.

FINIS.

MVSEVM
BRITAN
NICVM